

ALL THE YEAR ROUND.

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QUITE ALONE.

BOOK THE SECOND: WOMANHOOD.

CHAPTER XLV. HIGH SCHOOL OF HORSEMANSHIP.

RANELAGH! Ranelagh! Are you quite sure? Ranelagh? Is the word no misprint, no clerical error? I think I hear the judicious critic ask this question as he reads the last chapter of this story, scratching his ear meanwhile. Then, he may haply fling the book by, altogether. Ranelagh! Come, this exceeds human patience. Had I said White Conduit House, that might have been barely tolerable. But Ranelagh! Why, that was a place whither Horace Walpole went when he was a beau, and the Miss Gunnings when they were belles. It was altogether an eighteenth-century place, devoted to periwigs, hoops, powder, patches, brocaded sacks, clocked hose, high-heeled shoes, fans, small-swords, cocked-hats, and clouded canes. Our great-grandmothers went to Ranelagh in sedan-chairs, and attended by little black boys. A certain Mrs. Amelia Booth (wife of a captain in a marching regiment, and known to a certain Mr. Henry Fielding) supped there one night, more than a hundred years ago, in company with a clerical gentleman who had a few words during the evening with a British nobleman.

To which I reply that I know what I am about, and that there is reason in the roasting of eggs. The place of amusement to which the Pilgrims repaired, after dining so well in Park-lane, shall be Ranelagh, if you please. This is an age in which the exercise of some discretion in literature is necessary. Your contemporaries will forgive everything but the naming of names. You may write and say the thing which is *not*; but beware of giving utterance to that which *is*. You know that the Memoirs of the candid Talleyrand are not to be published until full thirty years have elapsed from the period of his lamented death. Some few of the contemporaries of Charles Maurice, who might be compromised, are still alive; and the candid creature could be discreet, even in the tomb. For a similar reason, the place I have in my eye shall be Ranelagh. There are numbers of ladies and gentlemen still extant, and flourishing like green bay-trees, who have heard the chimes at midnight in Ranelagh's leafy orchards, and have occasionally taken slightly more lobster-salad than was

good for them in those recesses. So, let the place I have in my eye be Ranelagh; though, if you choose to get a private Act of Parliament, or the Royal Permission, or a License from the Heralds' College, or to exercise your own sweet will, there is nothing to prevent your calling it Tivoli, or Marylebone, or Spring Gardens.

Besides, did not a gentleman, a few pages since, make the profoundly philosophical, if not entirely original remark, that there was a river in Macedon and a river in Monmouth. How many Ptolemys were there? There may have been Ranelaghs and Ranelaghs. All were not necessarily patronised by Horace Walpole and the Misses Gunning. Is there not a London in Middlesex, and a London in Canada? A Boulogne in the department of the Seine, and a Boulogne in the department of the Pas de Calais? An Aix in Savoy, an Aix in Provence, and an Aix in Rhenish Prussia? An Alexandria in the land of Egypt, and an Alexandria in the state of Virginia?

At all events, all the Ranelaghs are gone by this time—your Ranelagh and my Ranelagh. Yes; the pleasant place is departed. The fifty thousand additional lamps are fled, and the garlands of flowers, real and artificial, are dead. The plaster statues have reverted to dust and their primitive gypsum; the trees have been cut down; their very roots grubbed up. Bricks and mortar invade the once verdant expanse of the Ramilies ground. No more balloons ascend from that Campus Martius. There are wine-cellarers where once the lake was; pantries and sculleries where once the panorama of Moscow raised its cupolas of painted canvas, profusely festooned with squibs and crackers, to the starlit sky. Pulled down, laid waste, and laid out again: such has been the fate of Ranelagh. Its present desolation of hods, scaffold-poles, and places where rubbish may be shot, seems even more dreadful than would be utter solitude and silence. Somebody Else—that ruthless and immovable Somebody Else—has got hold of Ranelagh, and turned it to other uses. May it, under its new aspect, be profitable to Somebody! It is certain that Ranelagh, as Ranelagh, never did pay Anybody.

Is it necessary to shed a few sympathetic tears over the parterres, the fountains, the umbrageous alleys, the labyrinths and grottos, the supper-arbours, the long ball-room—over

the orchestra with its shell-shaped sounding-board, and the little hutch beneath, where you purchased the creaming stout in brown jugs which might once have been Toby Philpots, and have lived in the vales? I should like so to weep, a little; but, unfortunately, there is no time to weep. The Pilgrims and Madame Ernestine, professor of the high school of horsemanship, are waiting. Let others mourn the fiddlers who were wont to wear the cocked-hats; the tipsy, fraudulent waiters, alternately cringing and abusive; the masters of the ceremonies, humble disciples of the school of the immortal S——; the money-takers; the gipsy fortune-teller and the prophetic hermit. They were all worthy folk, no doubt, but have disappeared. So have the petrified fowls at five shillings each, the ham cut so thin that it resembled the leaves of some fatty sensitive plant, and curled into shrinking convolutions when you touched it; the rack punch, so called from its fumes inflicting on you next morning the worst tortures of the Tower of London and the Spanish Inquisition; and that remarkable rose-pink champagne which never went round more than once, and never cost less than half a guinea a bottle.

It was M'Variety who, as Tom Tuttleshell correctly observed, had hit upon the notable device of opening Ranelagh in the winter, and at a shilling a head. The experiment was disastrous—every experiment ended, in the long run, at Ranelagh in catastrophe—but its commencement was not destitute of a certain brilliance. Thomas Tuttleshell had done M'Variety much good since the beginning of the winter season. He had made up many parties, and brought many lords there. He had interested himself with editors, and affably presided at a supper of the élite of intellect held to inaugurate the artificial skating pond. In fact, with the exception of the capitalist in the wine trade, who was losing his weekly hundreds in backing the manager of Ranelagh, Thomas Tuttleshell was M'Variety's dearest friend.

The manager was standing at the water-wicket, keeping, as was his custom, a very sharp look-out both on the pay-place and the free list box, as the party from the Pilgrims' Club alighted from their cab. It may be imagined how many cordial pressures of the hand he bestowed on Tom, and how many sweeping bows he favoured his illustrious visitors with. M'Variety was a man in a chronic state of bankruptcy, but who constantly arose, smiling and cheerful, as though refreshed by ruin. There never was, perhaps, a debtor who was so much beloved by his creditors. Those to whom he owed most were generally the first to help him to start afresh: It was the opinion of the capitalist in the wine trade—an opinion frequently expressed as he signed the weekly cheques—that it was no good crying after spilt milk; that a man could not eat his cake and have it; that you could not always be turning over your money ten times a year; and that there was a deal of meat on M'Variety yet. "Sir," the enthusiastic capi-

talist would exclaim, "if Ranelagh was to be swallowed up by an earthquake next Saturday night, Mac would have the neatest bill about the ruins (as patronised by royalty) to be seen at three o'clock in the afternoon and nine o'clock at night, out in Sunday's paper, that ever you saw. He is a man of spirit, sir, is Mac." So the capitalist went on signing cheques and sending in cases upon cases of the rose-pink champagne.

M'Variety always looked after his small liabilities, and let the large ones take care of themselves. He who would owe much, and yet live undisturbed, should always pay his washerwoman. It is astonishing when you owe a man thirty-seven thousand pounds to find how eager he is to ask you to dinner, and to lend you another three thousand pounds to make up the round sum. Mac always paid his small people. He never treated his underlings to an empty treasury. The ghost walked regularly at Ranelagh at three o'clock on Saturday afternoon, however spare the promenaders on Friday night might have been. Thus it came about that the small folks loved M'Variety, and that the master carpenter, to whom he had presented a silver snuff-box for his exertions in getting up the firework scaffolding for the panorama of Moscow, declared, with tears in his eyes, that the governor was the honestest soul he ever drove a nail for, and that if timber ever ran short in the gardens, he'd cut down Bushey Park (at the risk of transportation for life) sooner than the governor should want it. And finally, as Mac, whether it was hail, rain, or sunshine with him, always entertained a retinue of old pensioners, and took great care of an old grandmother (who considered him the brightest genius of any age) and two spinster sisters down in Devonshire, he was not, perhaps, on the whole, such a bad sort of a fellow.

"Tiptoppers?" whispered the manager to his friend, as he hustled officiously in advance of his guests.

"The very first," Thomas returned. "An earl, a baron, and a foreign count: no end of a swell. The conceited puppy," he added, mentally, to compensate for his slightly imaginative eulogium on Edgar Greyfaunt. It was a harmless peculiarity of our friend that he always gave his aristocratic acquaintances a step in rank. Thus, if you were a captain, he spoke of you as colonel; if you were an archdeacon, he made you a bishop.

"Sure I'm very much obliged to you, Tom," went on M'Variety. "Come and chop on Sunday?"

"Thanks. Can't promise, but we'll see."

"Well, I know you will if some other swell doesn't turn up. This way, gentlemen. You're just in time for the circus. Just a goin' to begin, as the showman said."

"Who is this Madame Ernestine, Mr. M'Variety?" asked Sir William Long, quitting Lord Carlton's arm to walk with the manager.

"Famous French equestrian, my lord. Just

arrived from Paris. Turned all the people's heads there. Pay her a tremendous salary."

"I am Sir William Long," the baronet said, quietly, "and should be very much obliged if you would tell me anything definite about this Madame Ernestine. I am very curious, indeed, to learn."

The manager indulged in a subdued—a very subdued—whistle. He glanced at the baronet's face, and saw that it wore an expression of earnest curiosity.

"Well, she ain't young, Sir William," he made answer.

"If she is the person I mean, she must be forty years of age, or thereabouts."

"You may bet your money on *that* horse, Sir William," acquiesced the manager. "Hope you'll excuse my familiarity, but I've always found the swells most affable. His Grace the Duke of Darbyshire comes here twice a week, thanks to my friend Tom Tuttleshell. Invaluable fellow, Tom. His grace wanted to drive his four-in-hand over the artificial lake, but I was obliged to refuse him, for fear of accidents, and the newspapers, and that sort of thing. Ah! you've no idea what a hard life mine is, and what a manager has to put up with. Those licensing magistrates are enough to worry one into the grave. Only think. That stupid old Serjeant Timberlake, the chairman, was nearly giving a casting vote against our shop, on the ground that skating was immoral, and that coloured lamps led to drinking."

"Believe in my sympathy, Mr. M'Variety; but this Madame Ernestine, now. You say that she is not young?"

"She's no chicken, and that's a fact; but this is, of course, *entre nous*. Ladies in her profession are never supposed to grow old."

"Is she handsome?"

"Makes up uncommonly well at night; doesn't spare the 'slap,' you know, the red and white," responded Mr. M'Variety, diplomatically.

"Can you tell me anything more about her? I have a particular object in inquiring, far beyond any impertinent curiosity."

"All communications strictly confidential, eh? Well, I don't mind telling *you*, Sir William, though it's against my rules. My standing orders to my stage-door keeper, when any questions are asked him by parties—and some have been asked by the very first in the land—about the ladies and gentlemen of the company, is to tell 'em to find out, and, if they ain't satisfied with *that*, to write to Notes and Queries. That generally satisfies the Paul Prys, and you don't know how we're bothered with 'em. Now, to tell you the honest truth about Madame Ernestine, she's about the most mysterious party I ever knew, and I have known a *few* mysterious parties in my time, Sir William."

"I have no doubt of it, Mr. M'Variety; pray proceed."

"I can't make out whether she's a French-woman or an Englishwoman. She speaks one language as well as the other. She swears like

a trooper, and drinks like a fish, which ain't very uncommon in the horse-riding profession; but then she gives herself all sorts of fine-lady airs, and treats you as if you were a door-mat. She says she was married to a tremendous swell, an Englishman, who is dead, and that she is a lady in her own right. My treasurer, Van Post, won't believe it, and you'd find it rather hard to meet with a sharper customer than Billy Van Post. 'If she's a lady,' says he, 'why don't she go to her relations?'

"Is she talented?"

"Clever as Old Scratch, to whom, I think, she's first cousin. But, to tell you the honest truth, Sir William, she's too old for the kick-out business. At her time of life, the swells don't care about seeing her jump through the hoops. It's time for her to cover up her ankles, Sir William. Tom Tuttleshell told her so, and she offered to knock him down for it; but we got her to listen to reason at last. You see, Tom found her out for me in Paris, and I pay her a thumping salary."

"But does it pay you to do so?"

"That's just it, Sir William. You'd hardly credit it, but it does pay tremendously. That ingenious fellow, Tom Tuttleshell, put me up to the dodge of the high school of horsemanship which he had seen at Franconi's. It's as easy as lying," pursued the candid Mr. M'Variety, "and it ain't far off from lying, anyway."

"What may this novel invention be?"

"Just this: You've got a lady rider that's clever—first-rate, mind, but passy. Well, you just put her into a riding-habit and a man's hat, and you give her a trained horse and a side-saddle, and she makes him go through all kind of capers to slow music, and the audience they go half wild with excitement. It's a new thing, Sir William, and tickles 'em. The British public are very capricious, and have got tired of the Three Graces on one horse, and the Swiss Shepherdess on her milk-white steed, and such like."

"And the high-school horse?"

"Perfection. When Tom first dug out Madame Ernestine in Paris, she was very low down in the world, going round the fairs, I have heard say, as a spotted girl, or a mermaid, or a giantess, or something not worth five-and-twenty bob a week, at all events. She was quite broken, in fact, and good for nothing but to make play with the brandy-bottle. Well, Tom saw there was something in her, and that she was exactly the kind of party for the high-school business, and he managed to pick up a horse from an Italian fellow that kept a waxwork show—Venti something his name was; and that horse and the madame have turned me in a pretty penny since I opened. I wish everything else in the gardens had turned out as profitably," M'Variety added, with a half-sigh.

"And the madame, as you call her, is a success?"

"Draws tremendously. As I warned you, she's no great shakes as to youth or good looks; but for pluck, action, and general 'go,' that

woman," the manager continued, confidentially, "may be considered a Ripper. Fear! She doesn't know what fear is. Five-barred gates! She'd take the wall of the King's Bench Prison, chevaux-de-frise and all, and leap over the Surrey Hills into the bargain. She's a Ripper, Sir William, and nothing but a Ripper."

"Is she alone—I mean, does she live alone?"

"Yes and no. Husband's dead, so she says. That I told you. The waxwork Italian says he's her uncle, but he's abroad. She has a fresh servant about once every fortnight, after she's broken the old one's head with a water-jug. Barring that, I think she's alone. Stay, there's a little chit of a girl that lives with her—a niece, or cousin, or dependent of some kind, though Billy Van Post, my treasurer, will have it that she's the madame's daughter. A quiet little girl she is, and would be pretty if she wasn't so thin and pale. Like a little ghost she is. The madame leads her an awful life."

And the name of this little girl?"

"There you ask more than I can tell you. My wife calls her a little angel, and the people about the gardens have nicknamed her Cinderella. She gets more kicks than halfpence from the madame; and I sometimes feel inclined to interfere, only we like to leave these foreign horse-riders to themselves as much as we can. The madame has a devil of a temper. Twice I've been obliged to go bail for her good behaviour at Lambeth Police Court, after she and the water-jug and her dressers have fallen out."

"It is the countess," thought Sir William Long. "Poor little Lily!" To Mr. M'Variety he went on, abstractedly: "It is pretty, very pretty, indeed."

The conversation to which I have striven to give coherent sequence, had in reality been made up of disjointed fragments strewn about by the voluble M'Variety as they wandered through the gardens. Long before its close they had entered the wooden pavilion fitted up as a circus, and ensconced themselves in the manager's own private box. Here Lord Carlton, after expressing to Tom Tuttleshell his opinion that M'Variety was a worthy, a very worthy, fellow, went placidly to sleep. Tom, who was one of the most placable of creatures, and had quite forgotten Edgar's offensive manner towards him, would have been very happy to entertain the young man with a lively description of everything and everybody connected with Ranelagh; but the sultan chose to continue superciliously sulky, and Tom, seeing that he was merely wasting his words, slipped out of the box, and had a walk round the gardens, where he found numbers of people who felt amazingly flattered and patronised by his condescending to talk to them.

Sir William Long was too much engaged with his own thoughts to notice the departure of Tom, or of the polite manager, who, when his guests were seated, withdrew to see after one of his thousand-and-one concerns about the gardens. Between the slumbering peer and

the simpering dandy—who was looking at the audience in the hope, and with the expectation, that they were looking at and admiring him—Sir William Long had ample scope to think. The memories came rushing over him. In the desert of a misspent life two or three oases started up. His remembrance went back to a dinner at Greenwich, to a little timid girl he had petted, and made playful love to, to a kiss he had printed on her forehead. How many years had passed since that dinner, and yet how many hundreds of times he had recalled it; how vividly he could recall its minutest incidents, now! Why? It was but an ordinary tavern festival. He had been at scores of similar revelries, in company as good, as bad, or as indifferent, since. There had been nothing about it out of the common. Nothing but the child who had sat by his side. And what was she to him: to him, a gentleman of wealth, title, and ancient descent? If she lived, and were indeed this Ernestine's dependent, she could scarcely be a woman, even now, and he was worn and grizzled. Why should his thoughts revert, again and again, to the childish playmate—the playmate but of an hour—whom he had kissed in the tavern hall?

"Here is the high school of horsemanship," remarked Mr. Greyfaunt. "What a dreadful old harridan in a riding-habit to be sure! She looks like Queen Boadicea addressing the ancient Britons."

The Swiss Shepherdess had whirled round the arena on her milk-white steed, scattering artificial flowers out of a kind of decorated milk-pail, and casting quantities of pulverised tan into the eyes of the groundlings. The Three Graces, in very short skirts, and somewhat faded fleshings, had likewise made the circuit of the ring on their solitary steed. The clown had uttered his usual dreary witticisms; and his colleague, rival, and deadly foe, a French grotesque, attired in garments of parti-coloured hue, had tied himself into several knots, grinned between his legs, knocked the back of his head against the small of his back, and uttered the customary ejaculations of "La, la!" to the immense delight of the audience. French grotesques were novelties in those days, and the mountebank in question was exceedingly popular.

The legitimate British clown stood apart, watching the gyrations of his alien competitor with intense disgust.

"That fit for a Hinglish king, is it?" muttered the Briton. "That's the sort of thing that's to go down at Windsor Castle, before the r'yal fam'ly and the nobility and gentry. It's enough to make a fellow take to the busking game, or turn Methody parson at once. I'd rather be a barker to a shoe-shop in the Cut than demean myself like that."

Here the volatile foreigner, whose head was turned by success, and who was plainly presuming on his popularity, came up to our British friend with his tongue out and "I say, mistake——" The clown, whose cockcomb was out of joint, administered to him the kick of

contempt, a little harder than he would have done to an English colleague, and grumbling, "I'll punch your 'ed after the fireworks, see if I don't," submitted to be touched up by the riding-master's whip, to thrust his hands into the pockets of his pantaloons, turn in his toes, make a grimace, and to propound, for the seventeen-hundredth time, one of the seventeen conundrums he had carefully studied from a jest-book, bought at the stall, at the outset of his professional career.

I think it was subsequently to the performance of Herr Mooney, the spangled contortionist, who achieved such fame through his desperate efforts to swallow himself, that the celebrated trick act of the Young Strangler, from the Imperial Circus Samarcand, took place. Strangler used to appear, you recollect, as a British sailor, from which, by continual flinging off his outer garments into the ring, he was successively transformed into a parish beadle, Punch, a Scottish Highlander, Massaroni the Brigand, the Emperor Napoleon, and Cupid, God of Love. It was just after Strangler's second recel, amid thunders of applause at the close of his performance, that the band, which had been contentedly repeating, times and again, those good old jogg-trot airs traditional in all circuses I have ever seen all over the world, and which seems to have been expressly composed for horses to canter to, addressed itself to a very slow and almost lugubrious prelude. And then the heavy curtains which veiled the entrance to the circus from the stables were drawn aside, the barriers were thrown open, and Madame Ernestine, in a black velvet riding-habit, a shining beaver, a silver grey veil, and waving an ivory-mounted whip, made her appearance on her celebrated trained steed—a magnificent chesnut mare.

The high school of horsemanship required some time to be appreciated. In the beginning, it bored you somewhat. A long time elapsed before it seemed to be coming to anything. At first the movements of the trained steed induced the belief that she had got a stone in her foot, and was making stately but tedious efforts, always to slow music, to paw the impediment out. Then she slowly backed on to the edges of the ring among the groundlings, causing the women and children in the lower rows to shriek. After that she reared up, until her fore-hoofs seemed in dangerous proximity to the chandelier, and her long sweeping tail lay almost on a level with the dust of the arena. Then she curvetted sideways; then she went through a series of dignified steps, now approaching a gavotte, and now offering some resemblance to the *menuet de la cour*. Anon the musicians struck up a livelier strain, and the trained steed began to prance and to canter. The canter broke into a gallop, interspersed with sudden checks, with rigid halts, with renewed gallops, with desperate plunges, and which concluded with a terrific highflying leap over the barriers. The audience shouted applause. The grooms clambered on to the barriers, and held up between them a scarf breast high. The trained

steed took it easily, and bounded back into the ring. And then the music became soft and solemn and subdued again, and the docile creature subsided into gentle amblings, and almost imperceptible gambadoes. Such was the high school of horsemanship. It has been refined since then, and the leap over the scarf left out; but it still culminates in a sensation.

Sir William Long cared very little for the high school of horsemanship; but he never took his eyes off the horsewoman. She rode wonderfully well. She was evidently very powerful of hand, and had complete command (the which she exercised unsparingly) over her horse; but her movements were at the same time replete with grace. She flinched not, she faltered not when her charger was caracoling on a bias perilously out of the centre of gravity. She and the horse seemed one. She must have been Lycus's sister.

She was, more certainly, the countess who once used to live at the *Hôtel Rataplan*; the once-handsome lady who had dined at Greenwich, and taken Lily to be fitted out at Cutwig and Co.'s, and had left the child at the *Mar-cassin's*. She was the widow of Francis Blunt. "Yes," William said to himself, "it was she." Wofully changed in many respects she was; by age, perchance, the least; but there were the old traits; there was the old manner; and, at the heat and height of her horse-tricks, when the animal she rode was careering round the circle at topmost speed, there were audible above the sibillant slash of the whip on the poor beast's flank, the cries by which she strove to excite him to still further rapidity. And these were the same tones which William Long had heard, years ago, when the impetuous woman was angry or excited.

She had more than reached middle age, and her features, it was easy to see, had lost their beauty. Beneath the paint and powder, they must have been swollen or haggard, flushed or sallow. You could not tell, in the glare of the gaslight, the precise nature of the change which had come over her, or how she would look by day; but something told you that the change was an awful one. Masses of superb hair there still were, braided beneath her hat; but, psha! is not superb hair to be bought at the barber's for so much an ounce? But her eyes still flashed, and her teeth were still white, and her figure was still supple and stately.

Sir William Long waited until the high-school act had come to a close; and then gently woke up Lord Carlton. His lordship was good enough to say that he had spent a most delightful evening; but that he was afraid that the claret was corked. He also inquired after Thomas Tuttleshell, and being informed that the excellent creature in question was below, in the gardens, remarked that he dare say Tom was looking up some supper. Which was the precise truth. Thomas had fastened on a special waiter, one whose civility was only equalled by his sobriety—a combination of qualities somewhat rare at Ranelagh, and at other places of

entertainment besides—and had instructed him to lay out a neat little repast in one of the arbours overlooking the covered promenade: something toothsome in the way of cold chickens, lobster-salad, champagne, and that rack punch, for the concoction of which Ranelagh had earned so world-wide and well-deserved a fame. The quantities of rack punch drunk at Ranelagh by his late Royal Highness the Prince Regent, assisted by Philip Duke of Orleans and Colonel Hanger! The statistician staggers at the task of enumeration.

The sultan was by this time weary of the horse-riding, and strolled down with his lordship, lisping flippant disparagement of the "dreadful painted old woman" who had presumed to inflict her forty years upon him. If the countess could only have heard that complacent sultan's criticism! There was life, and muscle, and devil in her still; and I believe that the protégée of La Beugleuse would have essayed to tear the dandy limb from limb.

Sir William Long was glad to slip away from companions with whom he had scant sympathy. The sleepy peer bored him; and Greyfaunt's arrogance and petit-maitre assumptions irritated him beyond measure: he could scarcely tell why. "I am growing crabbed and morose," Sir William reasoned; "my liver must be out of order. I was wont to be tolerant of puppies. This young fellow is not an arranter donkey than hundreds of his race who hang about town; yet his drawling insolence makes me quiver all over with a desire to knock him down. Decidedly we are as oil and vinegar, Monsieur Greyfaunt and I." He called him "Monsieur," the further to disparage him in the eyes of himself—the baronet of unmingled English lineage.

Fortuitously he met Tom Tuttleshell returning beaming from his interview with the special waiter. He liked Tom, and, although using him, as most men did that obliging soul, did not despise him.

"Tom," said the baronet, "you are just the fellow to do me a service."

"What is it, Sir William?" asked Tom, who would have tried to jump through one of the hoops, or to attempt the high school of horsemanship itself, if any one had asked him afably.

"I want to go behind the scenes of the circus."

Tom rubbed his left whisker with a puzzled air. "I have heard of scenes *in* the circus," he rejoined; "but there are no scenes behind it, that I am aware of. There's not much to see in the place where the horse-riders go between the performances, if that's what you mean. Stables and sawdust, and grooms, and lots of people cursing and swearing dreadfully. Those horse-riders are a rough lot. Very dull and very dirty, and so on."

"Never mind what kind of a place it is. I wish to see it. Will you pass me through? or shall I ask Mr. M'Variety?"

"No need to do that, Sir William. I'll get

you in, of course. I have the Open, sesame! all over the gardens."

Tom seemed to have the Open, sesame! everywhere. They used to say he had a master-key to the bullion vaults of the Bank of England, the tea-room at Almack's, the omnibus-box at Her Majesty's, the copper door in the wall of Northumberland House, and the cage where the crown is kept in the Tower of London.

He led the baronet to a little door of unpainted wood, on which were rudely red-ochred the words—"No admittance except on business." Sir William told him where to find Lord Carlton, and Tom, after sundry cabalistic signs and occult whispers which made it "all right" with the doorkeeper (who looked half like a groom, and half like a gravedigger, and was, in truth, by day, a kind of under-gardener and odd man, who looked about the parterres and bosquets of Ranelagh), went on his way, rejoicing.

This was not the first theatre, or semi-theatre, by many scores, to the penetralia of which Sir William Long had in his time gained admittance. From the Italian Opera House to the little dramatic hovels of country towns, "Behind the Scenes" was a familiar locality to him. From experience, he knew that the best course to pursue in these strange places was to keep straight on, until somebody halloed to him to stop.

He heard the loud, angry tones of a woman's voice; and he knew at once whose voice it was.

He was in a kind of alley, or sawdusted gangway, smelling very strongly of gas, orange-peel, and horse-litter, leading on one hand to the stables, and on the other to a range of closets rudely partitioned off with planks and used as dressing-rooms by the ladies and gentlemen of the equestrian company. He was bidden to "get out of the way there" by a groom, who was leading a very stout and peaceful Dobbin, with a mild, watery eye, a very round nose, and a coat covered all over with spots, like black wafers. This was the celebrated educated pony Rasselas, that played at chess (invariably checkmating the clown), drank port wine, and made believe to read the Supplement of the Times newspaper.

Stepping aside to avoid this erudite animal, Sir William found himself close to one of the dressing-rooms just mentioned, and the door of which was more than half open. A lady in a riding-habit, the trail of the skirt thrown over her arm, was standing on the threshold, her back towards him, and raging fearfully.

Her conversation and her ire were apparently levelled at some person inside the dressing-room.

"You nasty, lazy, idle, worthless little wretch," she cried out, "you've sewn the lining in my hat so badly that it all but tumbled off and ruined my act. Look at it—look at it, you slovenly little cat. Look at it, you good-for-nothing, do-nothing pauper!"

With which agreeable and considerate remarks she absolutely wrenched the unsatisfactory beaver from off her head, and flung it from

her into the dressing-room towards the unseen object of her rage.

Sir William heard a plaintive little sob from the dressing-room.

The infuriated woman suddenly turned her tongue over, and in a voluble scream proceeded to abuse the invisible offender in French.

"Oui, pleure. Ça fera du bien, n'est-ce pas ? Ça raccommoquera un chapeau de trente-cinq francs que v'là abîmé. Ah ! tu me paieras ce chapeau-là, petite diablesse ! Pleure donc. Toi et un crocodile c'est à pleurnicher à qui mieux mieux. Petite satanée, tu me sers encore un plat de ton métier. Ne me donne pas la réplique, ou je te flanque une paire de gifles. Tu l'as fait exprès. Exprès. M'entends-tu ? Et ces palefreniers—qui sont bien les plus infâmes drôles du monde—sont là qui ricanent. Attends, attends ! je vais te tremper une soupe, fainéante ! Ma parole d'honneur, j'ai envie de te cingler les épaules avec ma cravache."

She made so threatening a move inwards, she made so ominous a gesture with the hand that held the horsewhip, that Sir William, who, although he could ill keep pace with, had understood the purport of her jargon well enough, became really alarmed lest positive outrage should follow her menace. He stepped forward, and, at all hazards determined to arrest her in her intent, laid his hand on her arm, and stammered out, "Madame ! madame ! je vous en prie !"

The woman turned round upon him with ferocious rapidity. In forcing her hat off, her hair had come down. Those tresses were not from the barber's at so much an ounce. They were her own, and were superb. But, with her locks streaming over her shoulders, and her bloodshot eyes, and the heat-drops pouring down her face, which Sir William could see now was coarse and furrowed, she looked like a fury.

"Cent mille tonnerres !" she cried out, "que me veut ce voyou-là ?"

The situation was critical—Madame Ernestine was a lady evidently accustomed to the adoption of extreme measures. What business had Sir William there, then ? What right had he to interfere with a lady with whom he was unacquainted, and who was merely scolding—her servant, perhaps ? A horsewhip might not have been an unusual argument in use behind the scenes of a circus. Now that he had gone so far, what was to be his next move ?

Luckily, Madame Ernestine evinced no immediate intent of seizing him by the throat, or of tearing his eyes out. As even greater luck would have it, M'Variety, the manager, came bustling up at this moment.

"What's the matter—what's the matter ?" he inquired of an assistant riding-master.

"It's that thundering Frenchwoman again," replied the gentleman with the gold braid down the seams of his pantaloons, and the moustache whose lustrous blackness was due to the soot from the smoke of a candle, caught on the lid of a pomatum-pot, rubbed up with

the unguent and applied with the finger, hot. "Pon my word, governor, there'll be murder here some night—she'll knife somebody, and get hanged at Horsemonger-lane. The way she bullies that poor little girl who waits upon her's awful. This is the third time to-night I've heard her threaten to skin her alive."

"Oh, nonsense," rejoined Mr. M'Variety, who remembered how well the madame drew, and wished to keep things as pleasant as possible. "It's only her temper." And he pushed his way by towards the scene of action.

"Temper be smothered," grumbled the assistant riding-master, retiring into a corner, and giving his whip a vengeful crack. "She's a regular devil that woman, and four nights out of six she's as lushy as a boiled owl. If she belonged to me I wouldn't quilt her ! I wouldn't make the figure of eight on her shoulders with whipcord. Oh dear no ! not at all."

"Mr. M'Variety," said the baronet, as the manager came bustling up, "you will infinitely oblige me by introducing me to the talented equestrian, Madame Ernestine, whose charming performance I have just witnessed, and whose acquaintance I am respectfully anxious to make."

Madame Ernestine appeared to be susceptible of conciliation. She curtsied with her old haughty grace as the delighted manager ceremoniously presented Sir William Long, Baronet, to her ; she even bestowed a smile upon him ; but she took care to close the door of her dressing-room behind her, and to set her back against it, and, meanwhile, from the countenance of Sir William Long, Baronet, she never moved her eyes.

The manager, who was always in a hurry, bustled away again, and left them together.

"Ah ! it is you," the woman said. "I have written to you half a dozen times for money, and you have never answered me. That was long ago, it is true."

Sir William explained that he had been abroad, sometimes for years at a time. Where had she written to ?

"It does not matter. You did not send the money. You are all alike, you men. What do you want now ?"

"Well, we are old friends, countess, and—"

"Bah ! A d'autres vos sornettes. What do you want with me now that I am old, and wrinkled, and fond of brandy, and cannot show my legs. You don't want me to dine at Greenwich with you now. I am ugly and coarse, and éreintée."

"Come, come, countess," pursued Sir William, "don't be cross. Whitebait isn't in, or we should be delighted to see you at Greenwich, I'm sure. You must come and sup with us to-night when you have changed your dress. Carlton is here. You remember Carlton ?"

"I remember everybody. How old and worn you look. What have you been doing to yourself ? You must have to pay dearly for your bonnes fortunes now. Nobody would fall in love with you pour vos beaux yeux."

She was unchanged, inwardly at least. The old, insolent, defiant countess.

"Never mind what I have been doing to myself. Will you come and sup? We will have plenty of champagne."

"Champagne! I am too old to drink champagne. I like cognac better. Well, never mind. We will have a night of it, as we used to have in the old time:

Eh gai, gai, gai,
La gaudriole!"

she sang, in an old cracked voice.

William Long could scarcely refrain from a shudder; but he continued diplomatic to the last. "How long shall you be changing your dress?" he asked.

"Half an hour. I must wash this paint off and put some more on. Il faut que je me fasse belle ce soir pour vous, mes beaux seigneurs. Wait until the fireworks are over, and then come for me to this door. Who else will be of the party besides Milor Curzon?"

She rolled his name and title under her tongue, as though it were a sweet morsel, and had a delicious flavour to her. I dare say it had. She had been brought very low in the world. It was long—a weary, dreary long time—since she had consorted with lords. Now she felt herself again. She would so paint and bedizen herself, she thought, as to make it impossible for them to discover that she was no longer young.

"Tom Tuttonshell will be of us. You know Tom?"

"Do I know my grandmother? Histoire de l'Arche de Noé. Monsieur Tuttonshell and I are friends—business friends—of some standing. C'est un franc niais, mais il m'a été utile. Who else?"

"Mr. Edgar Greyfaunt."

"Connais pas. What a droll of a name."

"He is to all intents and purposes an Englishman; but his grand-aunt, a Madame de Kergolay, who brought him up, was a Frenchwoman, and died lately in Paris. Monsieur, or Mr. Edgar Greyfaunt, has inherited the whole of her fortune."

"A-a-a-h!" the countess exclaimed, drawing a prolonged breath. "It seems to me that I have heard some stories about this Madame de Kergolay before. An old hypocrite who stole children away from their parents, quoi? I should very much like to see this Monsieur Edgar Greyfaunt. Now go away, and I will get ready."

"Is there any one else you would like to bring with you to supper? Comrade, sister, any one?"

"I have no sisters, as you know, or ought to know by this time. Comrades, forsooth! Are you in the habit of associating with stable-boys? What men are here I hate, what women I despise. You have asked my director, I suppose? He is as avaricious as a Jew, and has robbed me shamefully; but otherwise he is bon enfant, and amuses me."

"We will take care to secure Mr. M'Variety.

But consider well. Is there no one else? Whose voice was that I heard in your dressing-room? Had you not a child—a daughter—years ago? She must be grown up by this time."

The countess made him an ironical curtsy. "Merci du compliment, monseigneur," she sneered. "Yes, I know well enough that I am growing old. Du reste, let me inform you that I am not in the habit of bringing my fille de chambre"—she laid, perhaps intentionally, a stronger emphasis on the word "fille" than on those which followed—"and that if you will be good enough to take care of your own affairs, I shall have much pleasure in attending to mine. I come alone or not at all. Am I understood?"

"Perfectly. Brava! you are quite the old countess—I beg pardon, the young countess—we used to know and call Semiramis. Come alone, if such is your will. Now, good-by until after the fireworks."

He was retiring, when she recalled him.

"Stop, mauvais sujet," she cried, "have you got a billet de cent francs about you par hasard? I want to buy some gloves."

Sir William laughed. "You will scarcely find the Burlington Arcade at South Lambeth," he said, as searching in his waistcoat-pocket he brought out some loose sovereigns and dropped them into the woman's outstretched hand. She just nodded her thanks, and going into her room shut the door.

The performances in the circus were over, and the workpeople were turning off the gas. The baronet had some difficulty in groping his way to the door.

"She has not changed a bit, save in looks," he soliloquised; "what a devouring harpy it is, to be sure! If ever the horse-leech had a fourth daughter, the countess must have been the one. How hungry she used to be in the old days after money."

Madame Ernestine, on her part, was also soliloquising. "Ah! I am Semiramis, am I? Ah! I am asked to supper because it is thought I have a daughter. Ah! pieces of gold are flung to me with a taunt, like pennies to a beggar. Little devil!"—she said this savagely, and not to herself. "Thou art sticking pins into me on purpose. Quick, my pink dress; quick, or I shall strangle thee!"

BLOOMSBURY BOUQUETS.

I HAPPEN to live near the gardens of the Horticultural Society at South Kensington. So surely as there is a flower-show held therein, as surely does my landlord receive a letter informing him that at the end of six months I shall resign my tenancy. The annoyance passes away with the departure of the last van that removes the extra marquees, and I revoke my decision; but while the affair is being prepared for, being carried out, and being carried off, my resolution is inflexible.

On the thirteenth of this very last July, a grand fête was held in those Horticultural Gar-

dens. I was first made acquainted with the intention at about the end of June, through the medium of my mare, who is of a nervous temperament, and who shied straight across the road on catching a glimpse of a very large and very pink posting-bill attached to the paling of the Society's gardens. I know the mare objected to the bill; I think she objected to the announcement which the bill conveyed. A fête spoils her day; she hates the crowds of carriages through which she has to pass, the bursts of drums and cymbals which come across her at intervals, the lines of carriages, the mounted police, and the fifteen hundred red-waistcoated cadgers who rush forward simultaneously and want to hold her head.

The horrible announcement, repeated in the Times of the next morning, was read by my sister Alice, aged twenty-one, who thereupon handed the paper to my sister Edith, aged nineteen, placing her thumb on the obnoxious advertisement, and commencing to work the eyebrow-telegraph. I, pretending to be absorbed in devilled kidney, was nevertheless conscious of being jerked at by both girls, and, stealthily looking up under my eyebrows, perceived Alice's mouth shape the words, "Ask him!" Want of sufficient moral courage on the part of Edith permitted me to finish my breakfast, to mount the mare, and to go forth with a sense of gathering storm. No mention of subject at dinner. Dance in the evening at Lady Pocklington's, Miniver Gardens. My sisters dancing perpetually with Charles Bury and his cousin Sir Something Hardwick. I gloomy, with a sense of impending misery. "Oh, Fred, Sir Something says, we must go to the next horticultural fête; it will be a darling; it will be so nice; everybody will be there, &c. &c. You know we have no chaperon but you, and you *will* take us, won't you?" In the same strain Edith, to the same effect Charles Bury and Sir Something. I, savage, though still with a feeling of relief that the storm has burst. "No! I won't! Can't! Business, work, previous engagement, all and everything; finally, I won't!" Girls sulky and disgusted, Bury and Sir Something evidently dying to kick me, and I triumphant, but remorseful and wretched. So, home from Lady Pocklington's.

For the next fortnight, civil war, perpetual skirmishes, alarms of trumpets, ambushes, and one or two pitched battles. At length, a flag of truce, in the shape of lace-edged pocket-handkerchief carried by Edith. Parley. "Was I still obstinate?" "That might be *her* word; I was still firm!" "I would not go to the gar—?" "Certainly not!" "Then would I mind their going with Uncle and Aunt Naylor, then from the provinces, and staying at an Albe-mare-street hotel?" I am mortal. When my own convenience is not molested I can be generous. Let Uncle and Aunt Naylor be sacrificed. Ruat cælum. I called on the Naylor, they were delighted, they "had heard so much of the place." So had I. I knew exactly what would happen, where the bands would be placed, what

tunes they would play, how the members of one would pull their brass instruments to pieces and blow through fragments of them and hold them up to dry, while the other band was playing. I knew what people would be there, and the moony conversation they would have, and the heat they would get into, and the desire that would possess them to lie down under the fountains and cascades. I knew how Alice and Bury and Edith and Sir Something would get separated from the Naylor, and how, after the old people had transformed themselves into purple water-carts in their stupendous endeavours to find them, the delinquents would turn up late in the evening perfectly cool, and say, "Why, where have you hidden yourselves? We have been looking for you for hours!" I knew all this, but I did not tell Uncle Naylor. He was going smiling to the sacrifice, and it was no business of mine to suggest that he had better prepare himself by feeling the edge of the knife. I had made up my mind what to do that day; I would call on Tom Cooper, and he should bring out that great raking chesnut of his, and we would go for a ride through Willesden-lane, across to the left over Acton and Ealing, and so round home.

The day came, cloudy but with every promise of sun and heat, promise soon fulfilled. I thought I would take a holiday from business, make a few calls, and then go and pick up Tom Cooper. I made my calls on people who were all gone to South Kensington, and having put up the mare, strode off, not best pleased, to Tom Cooper's office in Gray's Inn, and at once proposed the contemplated ride. Tom is a man of few words; he simply shook his head, and said, "No go, old fellow! I'm off to the flower-show!"

I caught up my hat, and said, "What, are you, too, going to this tomfoolery, Tom?" I thought there was one sensible man left in London. Go to your Italian gardens, and your Life Guards' band, your plashing fountains, and your—"

"What the deuce is the man talking of?" interrupted Tom. "I'm going to no Italian gardens or plashing fountains. I'm going up to a local affair. My people live in Russell-square, and there's an exhibition of the plants belonging to the working classes of our parish, held in the garden of the square. It's a good thing! You had better come and see it!"

I remembered that I had read something about it in the Times, and I agreed to go and see it.

We drove through the good old Mesopotamian district, past Great Dowdy-street, Guiltless-street, Great Abnormal-street, and, passing Decorum-street, reached Russell-square, against the railings of which we found countless children clinging like bats. At a side-wicket was stationed the most harmless of policemen, who touched his hat with great deference to Tom Cooper, and admitted us into the glories of the square garden. I should like to take any reader of this periodical, blindfold him, turn

him round three times in the garden of Russell-square, and ask him where he was. I will wager a mild amount of half-crowns that not one out of fifty shall answer correctly. You look round you far through the hanging branches of big trees, you see no signs of houses, you hear no sound of the ordinary traffic, and when Tom Cooper told me that there were frequently four or five games of croquet carried on at once on the expanse of lawn, I received the information without the least astonishment, and could, if called upon, have affirmed on oath that the place known as Holborn must be at least a hundred miles away.

We proceeded through a throng of nicely-dressed people, past a band of volunteers who were playing the inevitable Faust selections in excellent time and taste, and into a big marquee, where the flowers were on view.

I am not good at flowers. I know roses, and fuchsias, and geraniums, and balsams, and convolvulus, and mignonette, and dahlias, and "old man." When I go to South Kensington and read *Kapteurotix splendidus*, I bow as on a first introduction. I have never met the gentleman before. But here, in Russell-square, I was among the friends of my childhood. I knew the elegant full-belled fuchsias, hanging with their bursting petals each over each, and drooping over the pots containing them; I knew the sturdy geraniums, with their scarlet flowers, their broad soft hairy leaves, their thick resolute stems; I knew the annuals, bright, and gaudy, and fleeting; and I pushed my way in among admiring crowds, and felt quite young again as I looked upon many a bud and leaf once familiar, but long forgotten. I was not critical in my judgment, but there were plenty who were; old men and women, doddering and placable, mechanics severely scrutinising each prize, and openly speaking their minds as to the justice which had awarded it, boys and girls swooping down upon the assembly with a pleasant disregard of corns. So through the tent, looking to the right and left, and remarking many excellent specimens of my favourite flowers. Outside the tent, a police band, all the members in blue coats and oilskin-topped hats; numberless young ladies in the most delightful of summer costumes, with young gentlemen to match, behaving as the youth of both sexes do under such circumstances; numberless rich old people bored, and stupid; numberless poor old people, wondering and dazed "which how they can wear them bonnets on the tops of their 'eads, and such rolls of 'air be'ind, good gracious!" numberless poor children; save those who were evidently exhibitors, there did not appear to be many poor people of middle age, they were mostly veterans or children, interspersed among the promenaders. And it was one of the curious sights of the day, to witness how thoroughly at home the children made themselves, and how, in the blessed ignorance of childhood, they utterly ignored any deference to the powers that were. They sat in little knots under the trees, and played at being owners of the ground; and they

played at a game which culminated in the height of the fashionable promenade, so that gentlemen bowing over the (in many cases) extensively jewelled ears of their innamoratas, were nearly flung to the earth by a little infantile procession running in and out among their legs, the members whereof were shouting, "Thee's thimble Thally, and the'th thold her thop," and with outstretched forefingers and hissing voices invoking oburgations on the said Sarah. I believe that heretofore the presence of a number of boys in muffin caps has not been considered essential to the success of a flower-show; I am bound to say that those young gentlemen added in no small degree to the enjoyment of ours.

Before quitting the garden, I had some talk with the genial and earnest honorary secretary of the flower-show, and learned from him some of its statistics. This exhibition at which I assisted was, it appeared, the fourth exhibition of the Bloomsbury Bouquets: the first took place at a private house in Little Coram-street; the second at the National School; and the third and fourth were, through the kindness of the inhabitants, held in Russell-square Garden. They are self-supporting; there is no touting, nor sending round of the hat; there are fifteen hundred shilling tickets subscribed for by the well-to-do parishioners; and that amount, with the shilling charged for admission to casual visitors, and five hundred entrance tickets for poor parishioners at a penny each, amply cover all expenses.

The candidates for prizes are divided into four classes: 1st. Persons living in the Little Coram-street district. 2nd. Persons living in other parts of the parish. 3rd. Domestic servants. 4th. Children in national, infant, Sunday, parochial, and ragged, schools. To each of these classes, prizes for the best fuchsias, geraniums, and annuals, varying from ten shillings to one shilling, are offered. There is also a set of prizes offered for the cleanest and most tidily kept rooms. Some six weeks beforehand, the district visitors invite candidates, whose names are inscribed; their rooms are liable to visitation at any moment between the entry and the judgment, and those who are successful are rewarded with a money prize. I was told that the committee generally had a difficulty in awarding this prize, so good were all the candidates. There are between two and three hundred candidates for the tidy-room prize; between four and five hundred competitors at the flower-show.

So I went to a flower-show after all? I confess it, and I learned something from it. I learned that the great arts of fighting against adverse circumstances, and of suffering and being strong, were practised among a certain portion of the poor with an exemplary patience worthy of all emulation. It had been my lot, in previous years, to live in that Bloomsbury district, and to groan and complain at the absence of all floral cultivation; yet here I was charmed by finding excellent flowers of my favourite kinds, grown under very unfavourable circumstances, in a very inferior portion of the identi-

cal parish. If the district visitors were to come to my study, I don't think they would give me a prize for a tidy room! We live and learn! I am not so rabid against all flower-shows as I was. The Bloomsbury Bouquets have taught me a lesson.

BEN'S BEAVER.

A PIONEER settler in the woods of Canada has need to be a man of brave heart and strong hand. We had been five years on our Canadian farm, and we had "a frame house" as fairly fitted for two families as two flats in Paris one above the other, or two dwellings joining in a semi-detached villa. My eldest brother had the wife of his choice and two fine boys. We had thirty acres in corn, grass, fruit, and kitchen garden. This conquest of the woods made the two brothers next to the eldest very uneasy. They wanted a world to conquer, and I remember when Walter, the eldest, now eighteen, said to my father, "Give John and me ten shillings each to buy axes, and we will never ask any more of you. We will give you a receipt in full for our inheritance."

"And may well do so, if you have your health and can fetch your food from home for a while," said my mother.

The result was, that the two boys started, each with an axe and a knapsack, for a place called "Thug's Hollow," ten miles into the dense forest east of our home. The tract of land, comprising a fine waterfall, had been bought by a man named Sugge, and he intended that his claim should bear his own name; but he lisped and called himself Thugge, and other folks called him what he called himself, and hence the ugly name was fastened on a very lovely valley which is now a beautiful and prosperous village, long ago emancipated from forest trees, beavers, blackened stumps, and its bad name.

On the mill-stream, where now stand the mills of my victorious brothers, Ben's beaver was caught in a box trap. He was a baby beaver, or he might have known better than to intrude into the small room that became his prison, for the bribe of a sweet apple. The colony of beavers that had built near where the corn-mill now stands, had been fastened out of their house, and all shot, by my brothers, while they were trying to get in at their own doors. It was a cruel and profitable job, for beaver skins then brought a very high price. Not one was left alive except baby Brownie, who was given to Ben by reason of his great love of four-footed pets. I went over to see the beavers' house, built of small trees, or saplings, which they cut down with their chisel-like front teeth, and floated into position in the water. The dam, as well formed as if men had built it, the warm dry rooms of the dwelling with their soft lining, the treasures of bark and bulbous roots for food in winter, all were wonderful to me. The boys had watched them at work for some days before

they commenced destroying them. They had seen them cut down saplings to repair damage purposely done to their dam. They had floated these to the place where they were wanted, and then, lifting the stick upon the fore-leg, as a man takes a burden on his arm, they had put it in its place, very much after the manner of a monkey. Many have said that the beaver carries burdens on his tail, and that he uses it as a trowel. My brothers were not able to verify these assertions. They were of opinion that though the tail may be used sometimes to brace the animal, like a fifth leg, or to hammer their work into place, yet that it is not used as a trowel or a raft. Perhaps the time they allowed themselves for observation was too short.

I took notes of Brownie for a long time, and he soon grew to be a big beaver, and very tame. He was one of the most cheerful and affectionate pets in the world, and, though he ate bark and bulbous roots readily, his favourite food was bread and milk; if it was sweetened, it was a special and delightful treat.

One of our neighbours was remarkably fortunate in finding horses that had gone astray. On being asked for the secret of his sagacity and luck, he said: "I always fancy myself a horse, and think of what I would want if I was one, and where I would go to get it." If I could fancy myself a beaver, I might hope to explain some of the singular doings of Ben's. He loved my brother so dearly, that Alice (my brother's wife) was almost jealous of him. It was impossible for Ben to separate or hide from him. On one occasion, Ben left home to go to Plattsburg and Whitehall, on Lake Champlain. This lake is nearly one hundred miles long, and has many steam-boat landings on both sides: being at its widest not above six miles across. The beaver was left at home, but when Ben went up to his room at the St. Alban's Hotel, he was met by Brownie, who showed no signs of fatigue, and indulged in the most extravagant expressions of joy. Ben rewarded his attention with a dish of bread and milk, of which he ate about one-half, and then laid himself to sleep on his master's valise. He changed to his master's feet when my brother was in bed. In the morning Ben missed him, and the remaining portion of the bread and milk. "Brownie has gone home," said Ben to himself. That night he stayed at Plattsburg, on the other side of the lake; when he retired to his room, after taking supper in the ordinary dining-room, there he found Brownie on his valise again. Again there was a joyful meeting, and an eager consumption of bread and milk and sweet apples. This time there was none left for breakfast. Still Brownie disappeared early, and not until Ben reached Whitehall was he again visible. It is to be noted that in all the distance travelled by this beaver, from our home, there was water. Brooks and a small river took him to St. Alban's, and after that he had the lake. The beaver is a poor traveller on land, and does better by night than by day. Much of the work of beaver colonies is done in the night. But, Brownie

followed his master by day, and made the same speed as the boat, and always knew where to land. The animal has powerful means of water locomotion in the hind feet: his tail he uses as a rudder.

Who or what told Brownie that Ben was to land at Whitehall, I cannot know, but there he was, ready to pay his ardent respects to his master's pocket, for the sake of a sweet apple.

My sister Alice had hoped when she married Ben to reform him of his passion for four-footed pets, by furnishing substitutes; but he went on the principle of "the more angels in the heart the more room," only he read babies and beavers instead of celestial beings. I remember Mrs. Ben's rueful expression of face as she exclaimed, "O dear! Brownie is a nuisance. He has built a dam in the parlour, of the fire-irons and fender and a music-stool. He has made a double-roomed house at the back of it with two ottomans, and lined them with the leaves of my last music-book. And then he has stolen my dried sweet apples, and laid them up for his winter's provision. But he is welcome to them now, for who would eat them after he has messed them over! Indeed, Ben, he *is* a nuisance."

"We are all nuisances sometimes," said Ben, "beavers, babies, and grown men and women."

"I wish you would speak for yourself and Brownie, and not for me and the babies, Ben," said Alice, laughing.

"Look at him!" said my brother, as Brownie combed himself with the claws of his hind foot, making his toilet as carefully as a cat, or a lady. We all did look at him, and we all forgave his mischief, and admired his neatness, sagacity, and affection. All the world forgives the pets and favourites when they serve or amuse sufficiently to pay their way.

The end of poor Brownie was tragic, and no settler in Canada has been more sincerely mourned. To this day, a tender sadness fills my heart when I think of him. He was mistaken by a hunter for a wild beaver, when the hunter was on an excursion with my brother in the backwoods. He was shot. Ben got his skin and had it stuffed, and to this day it is kept as a parlour ornament in my brother's Canadian house.

FRENCH VIPERS.

LA Belle France, sunny France, the land of wine and song, of the dance and joy unconfined—except by an easy zone of police restriction—who ever thought of it as a land of vipers! The viper exists, indeed, in England, which is merry, but he flourishes in France, which is gay. Something of his French manners and customs, the highways and byways, the life and times of him, gathered from recent publications, and personal observation, shall be set down here.

Of this, its only venomous reptile, France possesses three species, the Aspic, the Pelias, and the Ammodytes. To begin at the beginning:

Their fecundity is fearful, the female bringing forth (as the family name viper—viviparous—implies, alive and not in the egg like other serpents) twelve, or a baker's dozen at a birth.

In early babyhood, this pretty offspring spring back through the opened jaws into the maternal interior, as temporary refuge from danger. This simply protective system of the female has been falsely construed, by hostile human critics, as a destructive system of filicide on the part of the male. Let us be just even to ophidians. The "subject of this memoir" attains his full majority in his seventh year, and a contemporary aggregate length of flat triangular head, clear defined neck, blunt body, and brief tail, of about two feet. Attached on either side to the upper of his loose-jointed, flexible, elastic jaws, and within the line of the teeth, is a fang, sheathed nearly to its needle-sharp point, when in a quiescent state, by an extension of the gum. It is not unlike in shape, and in pro and retractile faculty to a cat's claw. Through it runs a canal fine as a hair, to the reservoir of poison at its base. The reservoir is supplied by a continuation of the duct back to the secretive gland or arsenal, which is situate among, and protected by, the temporal muscles. At the root of each fang lies the germ of another, ready for quick development. If the first be broken or torn out in heedlessly fierce conflict, as with a sportsman's boot, or a swine's tough hide, the aspic retires within his lines, or to winter quarters. There the glands secrete new ammunition to supply the exhausted charge of the reservoir, fine calibred fangs are refitted, and everything is prepared for the next campaign.

The flat triangular head and other parts of the body are covered with scales, whose form and arrangement furnish the clearest marks of distinction among the three species, and of their distinction from the comparatively harmless adders and other serpents.

The ground colour varies extremely within each species and their subdivisions, through all shades of grey, yellow, red, black, and their respective *ishes*, down to a dirtyish whitish. Over the ground colour, whatever it may be, save black, lie designed in darker tint, on the head a more or less defined V—the family initial—and following that, either pantherine spots or tigersque stripes harmonising with a dorsal line from neck to tail.

The doctrine of *signatures*, so celebrated in the schools of the middle ages, is now fallen to vulgar practice. The essence of it consisted in the belief that the Father of all had set the antidote always near the bane, and kindly indicated, by signs visible to his simplest children, the use and appliance of the former to the latter. And so those plants which in form or colour bore likeness to the viper's shape or spotted skin came to be called "Viperines," and much esteemed in the old scholastic, as they still are in vulgar therapeutics. Baleful, striped and spotted serpents, correspond to the striped and spotted formidable enemies of

man in the higher animal realm; while lower down, in the vegetable kingdom, we find the weirdly striped and spotted stalks and leaves and flowers of baleful plants. And again, in a subtler, profounder analogy, felt by all people, and stated, though not analysed, in all languages, the speaking multitude, unconscious of the poetry of their daily phrase, and the inspired writing poet, express moral purity by spotlessness; to them virginity is immaculate; stripes are the symbol, as they are the horrid proofs of slavery; freedom is equality, uniformity.

Aspic and peliade look much alike at first glance, and feel much alike at first bite. So that different witnesses offer, for and against either, charges that really lie in common against both. One authority reports, as proper to the peliade, a greater venomousness and agility, which another attributes as specific quality or defect of the aspic. The contradiction comes of generalising from local or other accidental conditions, such as season of the year, hour or temperature, or atmospheric quality of the day, the Cassius-like leanness or recent full-fedness of the viper. The royal psalmist, aptly enough for his purpose, compares backbiters to "adders, whose poison is under their lips." The difference—which is important—is to the moral disadvantage of the former, whose force of malice grows by what it feeds on. The better, creeping reptile's store of venom diminishes not only at every hostile attack, but by simple process of deglutition. He cannot have swallowed a hapless frog, owing to his muscular mechanism, without having expressed in the process a certain portion of the virus in the reservoir. So that an aspic is like any one else after dinner, a more amiable creature than he is before meals. Again, if he have already bitten or bit at A. and B. at noon, C. gets off with a comparatively harmless nip towards sundown.

Of the three species, the aspic is the most prevalent, the pelias lamentably so, and the amodytes rarest in France. The last-named, who wears a specifically distinctive wart on his nose, affects the warmer countries, and is hardly found except in the south-east of France. From the others—unless it be a strip lying along the British Channel and the Belgian frontier—no large district of Napoleon's home dominion can be said to be quite free; while in certain departments of the east, south, centre, and west, they are a swarming pest.

A few years ago the prefect of a certain department, liberating himself by a vigorous effort of common sense from the benumbing coils of administrative habit, caused a bounty of fifty centimes (fourpence-halfpenny) to be offered for every dead viper. In a few months twelve thousand heads were brought in. The department of La Haute Marne, in North-Eastern France, has an area of two thousand four hundred square miles—say a third larger than Kent or Somersetshire. A like price having been set there on vipers' heads in 1856, by 1860 more than fifty thousand had been paid for. But so far was this official slaughter—let

alone gratuitous private assassination—from exterminating the enemy, that in 1861, when the bounty had been reduced one-half, seven thousand and thirty-six triangular heads, ugly sight bills, were presented at the paying bureaux. The Baron de Girardot, prefect of La Loire Inférieure, in 1859, on growing occasion of accidents befalling men, women, children, flocks, herds, and sportsmen's dogs (the excellent administrator's zeal was quickened by that of the mighty hunter), addressed a circular to physicians, health officers, veterinary surgeons, and others in his department, asking information on the serpentine question. Among other responses, he received this from the mayor of Boussay; its statements were re-confirmed to Dr. Viandgrandmarais by the curé of the commune: "In August, 1859, at the Clemencière, a farm-house built a few years before in the marshy part of Boussay, there was a prodigious number of serpents roving all over the establishment, hissing in the walls, hanging over the doors. A woman killed eight of them one day. It was found, on careful watching, that they issued from under the hearth. Investigation in that quarter led to the discovery of such a quantity of eggs, that a double decalitre (a measure of about twenty wine quarts) could not hold them; and beneath the stone were fifteen hundred live serpents of different sizes." These, it is true, were not of the venomous sort—mere innocents, comparatively—though at the fireside their room is pleasanter than their company. Dr. Avenel, of Rouen, says he has "counted a hundred vipers asleep on a space of a hundred metres square." The ingenious Mr. Toussenet writes in his last book—so amusing, despite its gloomy title, *Tristia*—that, in the summer of 1829, he killed more than two hundred on an estate of a few acres in the valley of the Loire; and again, that in 1861 he knew, by his own experience or from that of brother-sportsmen, of fifty places in other departments "where thirty and forty vipers were killed of a morning." "They swarmed in the farm-yards, and courts, and garden plots." He cites an occasion where three of his dogs were bitten within five consecutive minutes; whereupon in the next following fifteen he and his two companions did to death twenty aspics. From a letter written in the last days of March, 1861, by the proprietor of a brick-kiln near Angers, he quotes as follows: "I have been using a new kind of fuel for brick-baking—to wit, aspics. You must know that all the snakes of the neighbourhood had gone into winter quarters among my fagots, so that I could not deliver these to the flames without consigning to the same fate an innumerable multitude of hissing spirits, that swore and danced in the furnace like so many devils in a pot of holy water. I don't know what had become of us, if we had put off the kindling to another fortnight."

If you seek other proofs of the "deluge of aspics" than are to be read in print, they are not hard to find. If, taking heed to your steps,

and to the sustenance of your character as inquisitive traveller, as you walk through the garden-land "beside the murmuring Loire," or the shady lanes of the Bocage, or the generous vineyards of the Côte d'Or, blessed of Bacchus, or the hill country of the Doubs, or through half a dozen districts of France, whose bold or gentle natural scenery and storied châteaux and varied wealth of association make all your ways their ways of pleasantness by day, you question country folks in the field; if, as you sit in the village auberge, whose excellent cuisine and spotless table and bed linen enable you, despite its dirty floors, to thankfully "shut up in measureless content" at night, you question members of the house or by-sitting guests, their answers, often set off with curious dramatic incidents and picturesque expletives in rich patois, will fill your note-book with "snake stories."

"Vipers," says Dr. Soubeiran, "are generally the first reptiles to leave their retreats, as they are the last to enter them when the cold advances." With the falling of heavy frosts, they look out for dry quarters under the moss, in the fissures of rocks, in the hollow trunks of trees. They consider *agot*-heaps as most eligible lodgings, also the close neighbourhood of stables, of furnaces and of other fireplaces, industrial or domestic, whither they are drawn by the warmth. There they pass the winter in a state of torpor, like old rentiers—not snugly rounded head to tail like Savoy dormice or American woodchucks, circled emblems of a complete economy that makes both ends meet, never in want of a meal, each one to himself his own preserved meats—but lying in confused intertangled mass, a hideous communism. It is a happy natural provision for the ophidian, which certain of the ill-fed, ill-dressed circles of the human order might envy him, this faculty of resting in a hungerless state of coma through the period which otherwise would put a full stop to his life. For he is exclusively carnivorous in his diet, and his provisions de bouche are chiefly made up of bats and rats, field-mice, moles, frogs, lizards (small birds for a delicacy), and insects, most of whom retire with him, or sooner than he, from the walks of public life into as close a privacy, or to another world. Insects, especially coleopteres, form the almost exclusive nourishment of the juvenile viper—his spoon victuals, so to speak.

And so, with these fulfilled, he wriggles off to bed for a five or six months' nap. Should the winter be exceptionally mild, as in 1829-30, he may creep out of a warmish day to sting an artist making winter sketches in Fontainebleau forest, or a folded sheep, or stable-yard boy, or other conveniently-exposed party, just to keep his fangs in; and the following summer will be noted as an abundant viper season. If, on the other hand, the frosts are unusually rigid, as was the case in 1789, his still life is like to change into a pure and simple nature morte. Then huntsmen and their dogs, shepherds and their flocks, barefooted little *gardeuses* de

dindons and the rest, go more safely a-field the following summer. Then you will not be so apt to hear the farmer's complaint that red Nannette's teats have been stung, and her wonted rich creamy milk all turned thenceforth to thin boarding-school blueness.

Snakes make ready to quit their winter lodgings by All Fools' Day; not moving far from them till the hotter weather, when they wander unrestrainedly. Their fashionable hours of promenade are after the dew is dried. Country folk know this, and so cut grass for their cattle in early morning. During the mid-day fervour they take siesta, coiled on the ground in the sun or bedded on a warm rock; hanging sometimes in the broom and on bushes, as it were in a hammock. The wart-nosed *ammodytes* occasionally affects trees—as if mindful by some half-preserved family tradition of the old primal serpent's mischievous performance in that kind. Under the slant afternoon sun they go up and down the earth again, seeking what they may gobble, and then early to bed. Are they night crawlers? The indelicate question has been raised, but seems settled by weight of testimony in the negative. At worst, it is only rare, belated members of the family who are found out after twilight. Night-hunting dogs and cattle left abroad are next to never stung by them. Individuals have been seen in water; but they are generally averse to that insipid liquid, and on the whole prefer dry and rocky grounds to marshy places, though lamentably frequent in some of the latter. The prevalence of the aspic in certain localities, of the pelias in others, and their common presence in still others, would seem to have some relation to geological conditions of the soil: but there has as yet been no sufficiently large and thorough investigation of this curious point to warrant positive conclusions.

The venom of the Gallic viper is similar in quality to that of other poisonous serpents, but happily inferior in quality. In one respect, however, he is more dangerous than the North American rattlesnake, moccasin and copperhead, inasmuch as he does not give noisy notice of his presence like the *crotale*, nor exhale so strong a warning odour as the other two. But he is a friend of humanity compared with some reptiles of his class in the East and West Indies and in South America, such as the *jararaca* and rattling *boquira* (*crotalus horridus*) of Brazil. The imprint of the boquira's fangs on the human skin is a death-warrant to be fulfilled within an hour. A full-grown French viper does not have, when his stock is complete, more than about two and a quarter grains of poison on hand. Of this he will hardly discharge at one stroke more than a sixth part. The wound, then, unless repeated and under "favourable circumstances," will not be fatal. Among these circumstances are, on the reptile's part, the season of the year, the electric state of the atmosphere, his degree of irritation; on the patient's part, age, sex, previous state of physical health and moral temperament. Of two hundred and three

cases occurring in La Vendée and La Loire Inférieure, noted by Dr. Viaudgrandmarais, twenty-four were fatal; of the twenty-four deadly cases, fifteen befel children, six women, and three men. Prompt intelligent treatment would have saved the lives of twenty in the twenty-four. The sting—for it is more aptly called sting than bite, seeing that the sharp darting fang has neither the form nor function of a tooth—makes a minute, scarcely visible puncture, less painful at the instant than the sting of a wasp. Presently the wounded part, oftenest at the extremities, begins to swell; the swelling extends up the limb, on which livid spots appear; nausea, vomiting, dimness of sight, vertigo, nervous spasms, prostration, insensibility, are the following symptoms of the progress of the virus through the system. The recovered patient is liable to a return of them in milder form—a sort of anniversary celebration of his accident—for years after, at the season corresponding to that of its original occurrence.

A few simple remedial measures are worth noting here. First and foremost, prevention and cure in one, is cauterisation with the hot iron; nitrate of silver and other chemical caustics are next best worth "exhibition." If you are wounded at an hour's distance from village doctor, apothecary, or blacksmith, bind your handkerchief, neckerchief, knapsack strap, or what not—not too tightly—about the limb, a few inches above the wounded part; suck it, open it freely with penknife, and squeeze out the blood; plunge it in cold water. Then if you have a flask of brandy or otherspiruous refreshment at hand, drink freely; if tobacco in any shape, masticate fiercely *without* expectoration. In other words, take any stimulant (don't forget coffee, in France), sudorific, or vomitive, and remember that you can safely bear a triple dose. The cold water checks rapidity of absorption in the system, and may coax out a portion of the virus. In parts of the southern states of North America, on some Georgia plantations, for instance, infested by rattlesnakes, it is customary for the overseer, when he goes a-field with the slaves, to provide a jug of whisky, or a phial of ammonia or "alkali," for instant application within and without in case of accidents. Phials filled with similar antidotes, and furnished with a sharp-pointed stopple to carry the healing liquid directly into the wound, I think you may now purchase of the apothecaries at Nantes. Finally, and as quickly as possible, go to the next medical man. The "natural doctor," in his default, may be consulted. You will find one in most villages, generally a shrewd old practitioner, with a reputation of being a bit of a sorcerer.

It is hardly a century ago (1752) since Dr. Carlian, chief of the hospital St. Barbe, at Bel-fort, making large use of vipers in his pharmacy, tried to acclimate them in a neighbouring ground. The receipt of the Theriaca Andromachi, a famous antidote, to which Andromachus, Nero's body-physician, added vipers for increase of efficacy, was preserved in the British

Pharmacopœia till the beginning of this century. Dr. Hebard's proposition for rejecting it was carried, in a most learned assembly, by only fourteen voices against thirteen. Dr. Paris, writing in 1825 about this venerable farrago of seventy-two ingredients, says: "The Codex Medicamentum of Paris still cherishes this many-headed monster of pharmacy in all its pristine deformity, under the appropriate title of *Electuarium opiatum polupharmacum*." There is still a pretty trade between Parisian dealers and viper-hunters in the provinces; a part of the venomous wares goes to the composition of the ancient theriacs, a part enters into the little pills of modern homœopathy. *Similia similibus curantur*. Viper broth is a favourite prescription with the Guérisseurs de Venins, Rebouteurs, Conjureurs, Sorciers, and other such-titled undiplomaed professors of the healing art.

Happily for the lay commonalty, besides perfects and apothecaries, French vipers have numerous natural enemies. The park of Château Vilain, writes Madame Passy, being most perilously infested, the proprietor introduced a squadron of wild boars, who soon made a promenade there tolerably safe. But the park was also remarkable for its excellent truffle grounds. The boars being fine gourmands, and preferring serpents aux truffes to serpents au naturel, made as sad havoc with the delicate vegetables as with the vipers, and in 1857 were killed off for their greed. Thereupon the pests increased again so rapidly, that two years later other boars were turned on again, to restore a tolerable balance of evil powers. That highly-intelligent, grossly-maligned companion of man, whom, at least in stomach—an essential part—he resembles more closely than any other of our inferior fellow-creatures, the domestic swine, fairly dotes on snakes. American crotals, Gallic aspic, venomous or innocuous, they are all welcome grist to his mill. If, perchance, they manage to prick through his tough hide, they are like to lose their fangs for their pains, while the virus rests a harmless deposit in the underlying fat. They are equally foiled by the fur and bristles of badgers and hedgehogs. Dogs, unless trained to the business, do not seek the conflict, and are constant victims of attack.

I have grateful memory of a canine comrade of boyish strolls in New England woods in pursuit of berries, nuts, and the end of holidays; of a short bureau-legged, tight-crimped tailed, parti-coloured dog, the mongrel goal of as many and multiply criss-crossed races as enter into the ancestral composition of any modern resultant European nationality. He was, to use the figurative language of the country, "death on snakes." With ears erect, sharp prefatory bark, and eyes alight with Napoleonic glance at the situation of the hostile body, he would spring and catch it by the middle, then whisk it to and fro, like a Gorgon's flying tress, with such rapid violence that before the unlucky ophidian could collect his senses they were fairly shaken out of him. Being presently done with the first

part of his programme, Puggins would announce his victory in a series of brief *Veni, vidi, vici*, bulletin barks, punctuating with crunching bites at short distances along the victim's vertebral column. Finally, if the field of battle were not too far from home, he would take up the spoils in his jaws and bear them, head and tail trailing low on either paw, into the house-yard triumphant. There he would, before nightfall, paw out a grave, then with infinite pains push the soft earth over the interred reptile, patting it down delicately with his blunt nose. Very jealous he was of interference at this ceremony; so that if we juveniles assisted too nearly and openly, he would withdraw the corpse and recommence the funeral rites behind the wood pile or under more retired raspberry-bushes.

Storks, crows, coughts, hawks, kites and other wild birds, and many domestic fowls also prey upon our subject. The common barn-door hen, set on by maternal passion, will attack and conquer, then, with feminine zeal, pick to pieces the insidious enemy of her chicks, and, clucking triumphantly, call them to eat of him and make their little hearts strong. Ducks, turkeys, and geese, the innocentest, stupidest, likewise boldly chase, kill and devour the symbols of cunning and wisdom, their light feathers protecting them against the fiercest biting.

And now to coil up this too long-winding essay with what good words can be said for the French viper. To begin with, he is not a seeker of quarrel, does not sting unless provoked. True, he is "something peevish," as Mrs. Quickly would say—rather easily provoked; can't abear, for example, to have his tail trodden on, nor to be sat on, nor squeezed, nor crowded, nor have sticks and things poked at him. Who of the prosiest best of us, let alone irritable poets, do like such treatment? Our noble Norman ancestors thought him a fit instrument of human, the editio vulgata of divine, justice, committing their condemned to dungeons infested with his company. The viper has been grossly maligned by that delightful old gossip Herodotus, by the poets, and by vulgarer fabulists, when they charge the parents with filicide and the offspring with parricide, on scant observation and no proof. It is a libel on the ancestors of the French aspic to lay to any one of their accounts the death of Cleopatra, Iras and Charmian, who—besides that those females were no better than they should be, if as well—were doubtless done to death by a cerastes, a small malicious horned serpent. Charitable apologists furthermore claim that vipers do good service to the common cause by destroying a great variety of vermin and other noxious parties. Probably *these* have also their uses, and will find their apologists. The general economy of nature still remains to the profoundest of our purblind investigations a marvellous system of checks and balances, of conservatively killed and killing. A poet, wise beyond science, aptly sang long ago the inconclusiveness of our conclusion:

Great fleas have little fleas,
And less fleas to bite 'em;
These fleas have lesser fleas,
And so on ad infinitum.

In far wiser, higher strain, another sings his grandly humble

Trust that somehow good
Will be the final goal of ill.

That nothing walks with aimless feet;
That not one life shall be destroyed,
Or cast as rubbish to the void,
When God hath made the pile complete.

The serpent with his tail in his mouth, has passed for an emblem of eternity, because of its endless circled completeness. The viper destroying itself by its own mortal poison, is a subtler emblem of everlasting life, because of its symbolising the self-elimination of mortality: the suicide of Death, *Mort à la Mort*.

HARLEQUIN FAIRY MORGANA!

It was about four o'clock of a Monday evening (to be particular), and only three days after the festival of Christmas-day (to be a little more particular); when the atmosphere was still pleasantly charged with particles of plum-pudding; when a fresh, inspiring, and, on the whole, not disagreeable darkness was setting in; and when up in London, some five miles off, the marvellous lamplighters were busy—how wistfully did we in our youth regard the delightful agility of those acrobats, and how often lament, when meditating a choice of life under the school blankets, that we could not be sent into *that* profession instead of being designed for Church, Bar, or Medicine!—I say it was at this season of the year, and this particular season of the evening, that word was passed down the playground that Young Peebles was wanted by Old Bridles in the parlour. The first of these descriptions referred to myself, and was scarcely distinguished by nice logical accuracy. For, I had not to be kept separate from any other Peebles, young or old, and the adjective, though characteristic, was mere surpluseage.

Old Bridles, though familiar and verging on the disrespectful, was more happy as a popular personal portrait. He was known more awfully as the "Rev. J. C. Bridles, D.D.," who was prepared to receive a limited number of youths into his family, to be fitted for the learned professions," the youths of more tender years being subjected to the immediate personal superintendence of Mrs. Bridles: a supervision, however, whose benefits she kindly extended to all the young gentlemen of the establishment.

The personality of Young Peebles (so I *must* call him) took his way slowly and without enthusiasm, to the presence of Old Bridles (for so, too, I must call him). A few days ago, alas! it had been different. The ceremonial of being cited to the awe-inspiring parlour had then become riotously frequent; crowds were rushing in that

direction. But now the place had lost its reverence. The boarders were going home en masse; all excepting Young Peebles, and a few colonial young gentlemen. The father of Young Peebles had been obliged to go abroad for health's sake, and so I (Young Peebles) was left with Old Bridles.

During this festive time Doctor Bridles fell into a kind of paternal manner, which fitted him uneasily. He was now in the parlour, in his curule chair. He held a letter in his hand. "Peebles," he said, "I have sent for you." (This I knew.) "I have sent for you," he repeated, and his face assumed an expression of severe Roman majesty, which was kept among the parlour properties for situations of importance. I grew uneasy in my mind. There was that guilty business of two parlour apples—débris of the parlour dessert, spoliated mysteriously—and spectres of the purloined fruit began to disturb me. That had been six weeks ago; but it was known that the school police was always vigilant, and that a statute of limitations was not to hold in shielding malefactors from the offended laws of their country. I, Young Peebles, trembled before Old Bridles. The revulsion was tremendous, when, instead of calling in the lictors, the doctor said, in his grandest manner, "Peebles, you are to go home!" Something like a whole magazine of squibs, crackers, and yet more magnificent Catherine-wheels, seemed to have been suddenly discharged at my feet. The parlour became filled with light, the bells began to ring, the music to play.

When the details came out, it was found that I was not going home, strictly speaking. It was Plusher—Plusher who had married my own and best loved sister—Plusher the noble, the brave, the gallant, the beautiful—Plusher of the Dog,* who had come forward in this splendid manner, at the last moment, but not too late. To say the truth, I had privately reckoned on Plusher all along, and had been deeply wounded—wounded to the quick—as Christmas-eve wore on, and I found Plusher not coming forward in the brave handsome way that might be expected from Plusher. Yet it was more in grief than in anger; and it was only when all hope did indeed seem fled, and when Plusher was proved by all human calculation, and the arrival of the last train, to be false, that I fairly gave way—that is, repaired to a private place and howled mournfully. And yet, even then, the glaring inconsistency in Plusher's behaviour struck the youthful mind. Why so surpassingly brave, generous, noble on one occasion, and now—? Perhaps there was some evil agency at work—a cloud or a fiend (either would do)—and before I would tear him from my heart, perhaps— But I am afraid I did tear honest Plusher from my heart that very night when retiring to my lonely pillow.

However, he had now redeemed himself nobly,

splendidly, superbly. He was John Plusher still, which of course he would have been under any circumstances. But he was the *old* John Plusher with three times three, and nine times nine, and English hearths, and homes, and the British Grenadiers.

In a flurry and a flutter truly delightful, and with the pistons of a small portable steam-engine thumping up and down over my heart, I left Doctor Bridles's roof. I did not care to affect the decent grief which, as part of the deportment at parting, the rules of the establishment required. I went my way with unconcealed joy; the doctor measuring me with his severest Roman eye. Ah, what days of delight those old days of going home!—the moments devoted to packing—to the agitated, disordered, imperfect process, known as packing. There was none of that skill or science in the operation which comes later with personal responsibility. For then all our property was in trustees: held to our use as it were, and at the peril of those clothed with the trust. Charming function! And how pleasing that flutter, that palpitation of the heart, verging almost on symptoms of disease; that exquisite feeling of unrest and inquiet which was almost painful, and yet was acceptable. Delicious ceremony of "going home!"

John Plusher welcomed me at the station, waiting patiently with a stick under his arm, carried much as a cavalry officer carries his sword, and a face so alight with good humour that it looked as if he had got some one to hold a wax candle inside! Noble, honest John! but I did not tell how my faith in him had faltered. He wrung my hand, and addressed me cheerfully. (He always seemed to speak in a series of short modulated shouts.) In the cab he mapped out a whole programme of entertainments, graduated in a sort of series, and something allotted to each day. Such Eastern liberality made me literally gasp, and I could only murmur uncouth sounds, meant for thanks, proceeding from me in a half savage state. I was not fluent by nature; and could only exhibit my gratitude in a gamut of "Ohs," increasing in intensity. The banquet was indeed bewildering; the waxwork, the voyage in the balloon (on the dioramic principle) which would take us to visit the principal cities of Europe (how delightful when the canvas moved on slowly, a little wrinkled, and the music began, and the gentleman-like lecturer announced that the next "voo" would depict the Halt of the Caravan in the Desert!); the Crystal Palace, the Polytechnic (including a real descent in the diving-bell), and oh! I began to breathe thickly as he named that place of Paradise, THE PANTOMIME!

I am afraid, when I thought so affectionately of going home to honest John Plusher, some gorgeous picture associated with this class of entertainment was before my eyes. Perhaps the notion was mixed. Once before I had been taken to this splendid spectacle; and though

* See vol. ix., p. 253.

then of very tender years, and with sensibilities scarcely developed, the impression left had been of something so exquisitely unearthly, so paradisaical, that I could never look back to it without an uneasy feeling reaching nearly to pain. I durst not dwell long upon it, as I was accustomed to do upon other matters, in the little apartment, under the blankets, where I used to cover up my head. And though, knowing John Plusher so well as I now did, I might reasonably have expected liberal behaviour from him, still I felt that these rarer and exquisite joys were uncertain in their fruition, and that the cup might be dashed from my lips at any moment. An ill-omened rumour had reached me that my sister—who had, very properly, influence over John Plusher—had begun to think plays sinful, and was actually sitting under the Reverend Puncher Hill, minister of the Little Tabernacle.

But these were idle visions. As we drove along in the cab, I reassured myself. Not only was I to go to the pantomime, but I discovered by a line of adroit cross-examination, that even my best beloved sister, Mrs. Honest John Plusher, would likewise attend. The line of adroit cross-examination was something after this fashion:

"I say, Cousin John"—this was not an accurate description of the relationship, but I always called him Cousin John—"I say, does sister like the Reverend Puncher Hill?"

"No!" said Cousin John Plusher, with amazement. "Not that I know of! Who is he? Where did you pick up that name?"

"Nothing," I said, breaking down at the opening of the adroit cross-examination, "but I thought she went to him."

"Lord bless me, no,—at least," added John Plusher, "not that I know of. Why should she go to him?"

"O, to hear him," I said.

"Why should she hear him?" cried John Plusher, a little bewildered. "What is to be heard from him?"

"O, the pulpit," I said.

"Not she," said John Plusher; "we both go to the parish church, to good Mr. Burkinshaw."

"O then," I said, joyfully, "she will go to the—the—PANTOMIME." (I always felt an awful agitation in naming this word.) And Honest John, though scarcely seeing how this conclusion could flow from the abstraction of the Reverend Puncher Hill from the question, said heartily, "To be sure she'll go; we'll all go, and make a jolly party of it."

More than that. It was revealed presently that a night had actually been fixed—the following night. More again than that. Places had been secured at the regular box-office, and of the regular person: who sat, with mystery, in a hutch off the street, and, strange to say, kept his wits, and was calm, though having the prerogative of admitting enraptured gazers to view the delights which lay behind. John Plusher took out a pocket-book and showed me the real tickets—one, two, three, four, five—all pink

and stiff. There was a halo or nimbus round each, and I handled them with reverence. Box voucher too: "Mr. Vernon, Box Book-keeper." Melodious description! And then the little note, by way of warning or caution, "Seats will not be retained after the first act," whose significance I could not bring home to myself even after deep and painful thought. For how *could* I realise to myself the existence of Beings so constituted as not to arrive at the doors of the theatre, hours *before* the first act had commenced.

The interval, though dragging at times somewhat wearily, yet, by the agency of various Christmas joys, passed with surprising swiftness. Some toys were brought in by Honest John: notably a drummer who played by turning a wire winch in the grass and gravel on which he stood; and, more notably still, a real locomotive, which by the agency, I believe, of secret clock-work, flew round and round on the floor at a frightful express pace. The sensation produced by this ingenious effort of mechanism was a source of unabated pleasure, until, strange to say, after only a few hours' traffic, it broke down (I now believe from over-winding), and never could be got to work upon the line again. Any attempts to repair the machinery were only met by alarming whirring sounds from the interior. These helped the day forward. But, in all justice, it should be mentioned that very much lay upon the noble foundation of all Christmas joys—plum-pudding. The sight of this delicacy, both cold and in fried slabs, which were the conditions of its second visit to John Plusher's board, did much to allay impatience. And, indeed, so hearty was my appreciation of its merits in the slabular shape, that I must make the humiliating confession that I came to regard this cherished friend, for a few hours afterwards, with feelings of loathing and repugnance.

I had asked John Plusher to purchase for me a Bill of the performance, that I might study the leading features at leisure. He had done so. A sort of heavenly programme, printed in blue characters, with a fragrance that seemed to exhale from it. The blue—though it *must* have been ordinary printing ink—seemed to glow with a gentle cerulean light. Even the thin tissue paper, so soft and gentle, as it were, was in keeping.

I read every word of it—that is, I and another boy, Chopeross by name, who listened in stupid wonder (and terror also, I believe) as I read aloud to him the list of glories we were to enjoy. It was like the music of an orchestra. The superlatives and rapturous expressions of personal self-laudation, in which I have since remarked these productions indulge, were like full chords. The name was "HARLEQUIN FATA MORGANA; or, The Lovely Fairy Bright Eyes." The overture and "incidental music" was by Mr. Burchell; the "new and sumptuous scenery" by Mr. Marsh Mallows; the costumes by some

one else; the tricks and mechanical effects by some one else; the monstrous heads were under some one's personal superintendence; in short, I was struck with awe at the enormous number of persons, each representing departments, who had contributed to the gigantic work. It did not occur to me at the time that this might have been the intended effect of these announcements. I saw, too, that the "Choreographic arrangements" were by Miss Robespierre, of the Royal Conservatoire, Brussels, and that the ballet would be full and efficient. And then the scenes, each so lusciously described! There was the interior of Mother Bunch's Cottage, with old Mother Bunch herself, and other characters with delightful names. Then, came the Fairies' Glade and Bowers of Pastoral Delight; then, a room in the king's palace; and so on—until we reached the "Matchless Transformation Scene!" Then I saw that the "Unrivalled Merlini Family were engaged to give due effect to the Harlequinade." I may say many hours of the day were consumed in devouring this enchanted document. It was a nervous time. Even so early as noon, I and the boy who was my contemporary began to have uneasy apprehensions as to being late, and moved about in a restless troubled way. At four o'clock, too long restrained by judicious remonstrance, it was resolved to commence the toilette for the night. This, it need scarcely be said, was on a splendid scale: the appointments and properties being of the most sumptuous description. Dinner was a pure feint. I almost felt indignant with Honest John Plusher for the calm and unfeeling manner—the as it were purposely protracted fashion—in which he consumed his food. At last the moment came; the cab was at the door, and we—I and the Contemporary Boy—rushed down with a cry of relief.

Five of us in all—John Plusher, Mrs. John, the Contemporary Boy, and a male friend of habitual good spirits—all went in, or *on*, the cab; for the Contemporary Boy was put outside with the coachman. We were hours getting to the Palace of Enchanted Delights (I believe the time consumed was a little over ten minutes), but we did get there at last. A stately building, with columns, lights, an air of excitement, and, oh! light bursting from within, and the old delicious inexpressible fragrance of commingled gas, damp sawdust, and squeezed orange-peel.

But when we trod the Gallery of Enchantment, dotted round with scarlet doors, each with a sort of peep-show glass inserted, and met crowds of delighted creatures tramping round like ourselves in a disordered procession, and who were gradually let in at the little red doors, and when Mr. Warbeck, one of the most polite and first-gentlemanly of creatures, whose manners seemed to me the true ideal of all that was courtly and gracious, came in a hurry with keys, and threw open for *us* a little door (some previous confidential solemnities having passed between him

and Cousin John), then I and the Contemporary Boy rushed headlong and tumultuously down to the very front row into the very bosom of the theatre. Theatre! Far too earthy a word. Soft realms of celestial light, happiness, and joy! The light ambrosial—the gay colours of Paradise—and bright circles, not surely of men, women, little girls and little boys, but of men, women, and children glorified. It was the all-suffusing light that did it.

There was a play. Not yet had fashion swept away the old custom of introducing the festival with some sound fruity old comedy of a didactic sort—even with the story of the unhappy 'prentice of the name of Barnwell. Barnwell was not to-night; but a delightful drama, softly mysterious and absorbing—The Castle Spectre! Ever welcome, even now, when the sense of romance has grown dull and the varnish is scoured off. What an interest in that artfully-constructed story! How grand the chief villain, Earl Osman, in the white furred cloak; and, as a picture of unscrupulous ferocious obedience, how wonderful the faithful black—Hassan, I believe, was his name. And the Castle! And the Friar! And the comic person! And Angela—the persecuted Angela! And the escape through the window when the blacks were absorbed in dice! And the Spectre! And the music!

But what were these pleasures to what was to come, when the overture to *Harlequin Fata Morgana* struck up, and all the funny tunes I had heard on the organs came artfully stealing in, popping up one after the other like old friends playing us tricks. And then, when the last chord had sounded, and the curtain drew up slowly, and revealed the interior of Old Mother Bunch's Cottage, with implements of cookery on a gigantic scale, and an enormous kitchen-range, with a gigantic cat sitting by the fire, and Old Mother Bunch herself—a terror-inspiring creature in a peaked witch's cap—I say, when we saw this prelude, forthwith I and the Contemporary Boy became fascinated, enthralled, bewildered, and drawn into one absorbing devouring gaze towards the stage. Round and round about us were little heads, peering, I *now* recollect, just over the edge of the boxes; and below the little heads wore bits of bright scarlet border and velvet jackets; and when the cat ambled about, or scratched its ear, after the manner of real cats, the little heads shook, and were agitated brightly, like silk shot with silver, and round us rang out the music of laughter in a high key. But for me it was otherwise—it was *too* delightful, too seriously absorbing to laugh at. And now—Mother Bunch's home dividing in two, and sliding away with all the monster kitchen utensils—to the right and left, breaks upon us the Glittering Glade of the Fairies, and the Valley of Golden Foliage! And with the appearance of that dazzling retreat, and seat of exquisite delight, came my Fate.

Only think! A glade whereof the trees and

branches, reaching as far as the eye could go, were all of yellow molten gold, and the whole bathed in a rich effulgence, half yellow, half pink! This prepared me for the cloud of angels dressed in floating clouds or vapour (not, surely, muslin?), who glided out from among the golden trees. But alas! it did *not* prepare me for *HER*, who, after the divine creatures had performed some motions and groupings of their own—exquisitely graceful—came tripping down from the very end of the glade: the Fairy Queen herself, with a glittering silver wand in her hand, dressed in blue vapour shot with silver, the surpassing lovely Queen Morgana herself! At that moment I felt a feeling—I can only liken to a sort of wrench—at my heart; and oh! from that moment I was an undone m——, boy I mean. A divinity, surely, hired secretly from somewhere up in the regions we heard of on Sundays (was this sinful?), merely to come down for a short span and then return! Her arms, not purely arms, rather the imperfect development of wings; not flesh, but a kind of divine pink essence, illuminated from within! And those—those—supports on which she floated, now hither, now thither, of ambrosial pink, and also illuminated from within! Oh! if feet (for I could not wholly shut out the idea) they must be called, were they not spiritualised limbs? It was not walking, but floating. What motions! What curves! What flying in and out among her subjects! As I said, from that moment I was a gone m——, boy I mean.

How obsequious, servile almost, were the fairies to her slightest wish—as, indeed, was very fitting. How they spread out like a human fan, like a human star; how they floated and drifted to the sides, and left the divine visitant in the centre—as, indeed, was only fitting. How gracious she was in her dominion—how charmingly soft and even winning in her commands, for one gifted with such awful powers! Then when the dancing set in, and ravishing music played, and she floated and swam and rose and sank, all in the air, the element natural to her, my bewildered senses became enthralled, until, at last, two dark terrible screens came together on each side, joined in the middle, and the golden vale and the golden trees, steeped and bathed in liquid light, were shut out from view. Alas! so too was the ambrosial fairy queen.

The procession came on now, the soldiers with the monstrous heads, some rueful, some idiotic, with halberds on their shoulders, tramping in to a comic march, and last the testy king—was he named Grumgrowski the First?—all filling the house with peals of convulsive laughter. The little heads were rolling about as if filled with mercury; the Contemporary Boy, who had before shown a tendency to acute spasms of mirth, now fell into a sort of agony of laughter, and dropped back suffering much. Honest John Plusher was roaring loudly, as his peculiar manner was; but I—I believe to their wonder—remained unmoved. The spectacle of the idiotic,

or even rueful beefeater, did not affect me; I gazed at the antics of the beefeaters stolidly, steadily, stupidly, and mournfully. I had a load of lead upon my heart—I felt a wistful aching that this poor grimacing could not satisfy. I was thinking of *her*, longing for *her* to return. And so the comic procession was re-formed, and danced off as they had danced on, the testy king last of all, performing what I suppose was conceived an exquisitely funny dance by himself, for he was called on to do it again, with frantic screams. I never even smiled. I was longing for him to be done, and was delighted when he skipped away to the side with a stupid jump and became lost to view—for I was looking anxiously for her to reappear. Now, surely she would come again. But no!—it was an Open Country, with a mill and a bridge, with a miller, and a procession of men carrying sacks. The miller, and his men also, had heads all knobbed and pink, like a particular growth of potato, known, I believe, as the kidney. Everything they did was welcomed with screams, especially when the miller himself tumbled into the stream. But in this merriment I *could* not join.

I was getting unutterably low-spirited. Even the Contemporary Boy, now well-nigh rolling under the seat in hysterical convulsion, for a moment looked at me strangely and seriously. Honest John Plusher whispered, "What's up, Jack?" but I put him back impatiently, for, at that moment, crossing the bridge, was a figure meant to be that of an aged crone disguised in a sort of domino and hood, but whom I, with a marvellous instinct, recognised as the exquisite ambrosial creature from above. This marvellous instinct was in some degree assisted by a glimpse of a glittering raiment, as it were, of liquid silver, hidden underneath; but I knew her at once. For the time I felt an inexpressible relief, and when, for the purpose of requiting the miller's daughter's humanity, she ultimately revealed herself in all her true celestial essence (as I said before, not mere flesh, surely, but something in the nature of manna, or of pale pink sugar illuminated from within), I gave way to my feelings in a torrent of delight. Short-lived happiness! She presently passed away, and then came the stupid comic thing again, and the beefeaters, and fresh palace interiors, and then a dark place, with many people huddled together, and then *she* appeared again out of the ground, bearing her silver wand, and looking—as it was plain to be seen she was—an angel among earthy and earthly creatures. Then she began to speak, to declaim in the language of her own celestial country—waving her wand—then the back opened. Then cascades of molten silver began to flow, and gigantic ferns to open, and glorified women to ascend slowly, and light to be turned on in streams and floods, and I to be generally dazzled, bewildered, and suffering from a sense of exquisite oppression! Then, pillars began to be revealed, pillars that revolved and glistened, and more ferns to open, and angels to ascend in

pairs; and then in the centre rose a fountain, which seemed to stream a rain of gold, and then with delighted applause bursting out on all sides, the waters of the fountain parted, and then in the centre was discovered *she* who I thought was lost to me for ever, more ambrosial, more celestial, more roseate, than before, there enthroned as queen, silver wand in hand, with all bending to her. I felt a thrill of joy, and yet I had a dismal presentiment that the end was not far away.

So it proved to be. The minor heavenly beings floated away in ranks to each side, and the celestial creature began to speak, oh, how melodiously! some farewell words. Not without a tinge of mournful sadness her utterances rose and fell. I could have listened for ever to that dying fall. My foreboding was fatally true. With her marvellous power, she was about transforming the miller, Mother Bunch herself, and others, into new and strange shapes—Harlequin, Clown, Pantaloon, and Columbine (Miss Robespierre standing dressed already at the wing). A wave of that wand, and it was done. Miss Robespierre came bounding on (ah! how easy to know that *she* was a mere creature of earth, hired at so much per night); the clown turned in his toes, and leered at us, and asked how we were to-morrow; harlequin glittered like a snake; and what I have since heard called "the comic business" set fairly in. But with this buffoonery the divine fires of transformation faded out. I had one last exquisite glimpse of the lovely fairy Morgana, more bright, more ambrosial than ever, waving her wand, when the two halves of a street came rushing together from the side, exhibiting the establishment of Mr. Beefley, a butcher, and Harmony and Co., music-sellers—met in the centre, and shut her out from me for ever!

Then set in, the old confusion, convulsing all round—houses changed into kitchens, gardens into steam-boats, and vegetable shops into railway trains. The clown and his decrepit friend took lodgings together, and when they sat down found their seats lifting them to the ceiling. Articles of food were purloined from traders' shops, the shopman always coming out into the street to arrange his bargain, and thus leaving his wares an easy prey to the evil-disposed and designing. Customers' heads were cut off, and fastened on again by the adhesive agency of the first glue-pot that chanced to pass by.

Finally, it came to an end, and we went our way. Going home, Honest John talked exuberantly of the whole performance, dwelling specially on the theft by the clown of a lady's crinoline, and his converting of its wires into a sort of meat-safe, and hanging it round with rabbits, cats, and live poultry; "one of the best things he ever saw in the whole course of his life." Mrs. Honest John fancied something else; the Contemporary Boy rather leant to the policeman scenes; but—poor blinded things—they were insensible to *her*. Not one of them mentioned her. "He didn't like it," said Honest

John, pointing to me. "Something was wrong. I saw it. He won't tell us what." My sister whispered softly, "You were sick, dear. I was afraid——" In the darkness of the cab I resented this: it was too much, for she had indeed gently warned me at dinner, when I believe for the third time I had—— But it was not the rich slabs of fried pudding. How little they understood me! I could not explain, and I have an idea that they set me down as sulky.

It was a relief to get to my lonely chamber. There, in solitude, I could call up the enchanting image, and feast upon all her loveliness. I made her rise again in slow time (worked by invisible mechanics) from among the golden groves. I bathed her once more in ambrosial light. I saw again in her angelic lineaments that exquisitely gentle and half-mournful expression. I illumined, too, from within the celestial substance which formed her arms. In short, I dwelt upon her perfections with a miserable pleasure, which every moment made me more and more wretched. I saw her as she appeared for the last time, and felt the curious sensation I have described as "a wrench." It was misery, despair, desolation. I began to toss, and passed a terrible night—the worst since the well-known measles epoch, when people sat up with me. Towards morning I began to dream, and I saw her again bathed in pink light.

I came down to utter blankness, and to—the meal known as breakfast. Everything jarred upon me. It all looked like school. It had the rawness and general prose of that establishment. I wanted to have everything bathed in pink ambrosial light. I was silent and gloomy, and could not eat with the indiscriminate selection, which in my instance was almost matter of notoriety. I became the subject of public remark. It was again insisted I was ill: an insinuation indignantly repudiated. Honest John Plusher then rallied me in his own pleasant way on being "put out" by something: a course of remark which bitterly wounded me. Then my sister, Mrs. Honest John, kindly changed the subject to the spectacle of last night. "It was *very* good," said Honest John—"uncommonly good! He had seen nothing better, in fact. Scenery so good! 'Jove! what perfection they've brought these things to now-a-days! Now, that scene of the dancing; the what d'ye call it——?"

"The Transformation Scene?" said Mrs. Honest John.

"No, the one where they come in and dance?"

I could not restrain myself, but broke out, "The Glittering Glade of the Fairies and the Valley of the Golden Foliage!"

They started.

"By Jove!" said Honest John, looking at me with astonishment. "But," said he, "it was spoiled by that stout dumpy woman with the wand: the queen, or whatever they called her."

My cheeks were burning. I felt them blazing. She to be thus grossly described! But, good

in the main, Honest John was a coarse creature.

"Eh!" he said to me, "did you see how heavily she moved? It was like an elephant waltzing."

An elephant waltzing! My cheeks like coals! Every eye upon me! I could not stand it, and fled from the room—crying, I believe. They must have thought me going mad. Honest John came to soothe me, but cautiously and with a sort of wonder. It was proposed that for the morning pastime we should visit a palace—the Crystal, or some such thing: "make a day of it," as Honest John said. I agreed. I was indifferent; they might lead where they would; nay, I even assumed a sort of wild and ghastly merriment discordant with my habitual character. It was done to hide the grim despair that was working under my jacket. I saw every minute they knew not what was come over me (how should they?), and John all through the day kept his eye carefully upon me.

We went to the Palace. I saw it; that is, they saw it. The despair and blankness was growing upon me more and more. I refused food. I declined buns and "cream tarts," a delicacy I was known to be partial to. I was pining to be alone again. But as it grew towards evening, and the darkness was closing in, and the street-lamps began to be lighted, the blankness and desolation seemed to come on me as with a rush—for I knew that very soon the ambrosial pink light would be turned on, and the celestial Divine creature would once more descend. The thought made me ache again. We were coming home in a cab. Honest John precipitated our movements with a good-natured apology, for that he was obliged to be back in good time to take Mrs. Honest John to a family dinner at old Backslider's.

The people were hurrying by very fast; gas-light was flaring in the shop windows under their faces as they went by. When suddenly a plot, a wild daring scheme, appalling almost in the stupendously bold character of its proportions, leaped into my head. I would do it, or, in reality, sicken and die. It must end.

In a moment my spirits rose. I astounded them by the sudden change. I laughed boisterously. I saw Honest John glancing at me a little nervously. I became almost exultant, but am ashamed to think into what a little monster of craft I became suddenly transformed. I accounted for the alteration in my demeanour by an admission that the sickness with which I had been charged had altogether passed away, and that I was now restored to comparative health. I pretended to have had nothing heavy on my mind but pudding.

I thought they would never go to that dinner. But at last they did. Then I hurriedly matured my guilty scheme. I took the Contemporary Boy aside and unfolded to him the details. He was first appalled, then stupified, by the daring of the undertaking. When he recovered himself,

he declined to take part in it; until, in my desperation having recourse to awful threats, he gave way. The scheme was a wicked, nefarious, stolen visit to the scene of last night's celestial joys. I made him a partner in my infamy.

Eluding the vigilance of the servants, we set out. But the night was wet and stormy, and our available capital, putting every strain upon our resources, was barely equal to the price of two pit tickets; a cab was not to be thought of. I wrapped myself up proudly in a stoical indifference (and also in the little shrunken garment known to us as a great-coat), and said I did not care. The Contemporary Boy said he did, and held back reluctantly. I had to use violence to bring the Contemporary Boy on.

We asked the way "to the theatre." Rough men invariably answered us bluntly, "Wot theatre?" I replied gently, the Contemporary Boy trembling at my side, "The theatre where the Pantomime is." He replied in the same rough way, "That warn't much help. Howsomever" (I distinctly remember the use of this odd word), "howsomever, he supposed it were the theaeter in Beak-street?" The Contemporary Boy said, boldly, that was it. Then we must take the first turning to the right, then to the left by the public-house, &c.

The rain was now beginning to pour down very steadily, and we took the first turning to the right, &c., then to the left, &c., and then broke down. We had to ask again. Rain increasing. Contemporary Boy beginning to cry, like a beastly baby as he was, at his saturation. But I should have recollected that he had not the Great Purpose within him, which I had, to bear him up. We asked again, but this time people declined to stop to answer our inquiries. We were fast growing pulpy; and now, in addition to the responsibility resting on me, I had the additional burden cast upon me of dragging my companion along.

It was growing serious, but still I held on. After nearly an hour's walking and an hour's drenching, we reached the theatre the rough man had directed us to. And here we broke down altogether. We knew from the outside that it was not the one.

I was still equal to the situation, and was calmly asking "the way to the theatre," in the same general terms (to which it was much more difficult to obtain an answer, as we were now actually *at* a theatre), when the Contemporary Boy, utterly disregarding the deencies of life, broke out with such noise—sobs accompanied with stampings in the open streets—as to attract public attention. I had a weight of care on me at this moment, for there was a tumult of grief in my breast, as of the aim of this fatal expedition being yet so far off; thinking, too, how by this time the peerless queen would have nearly reached the close of her too, too short career. A humane bystander taking interest in my situation and witnessing the insane behaviour of the

Contemporary Boy, charitably entered into the case. He learned from me a short outline of the Celestial Entertainment, with the names and situations. "I know," said the humane bystander—"I know the place. But bless you, my lad! it's miles away from here. If you was to take the best 'Ansom, and the best Oss as was in that 'Ansom, you wouldn't do it afore nine." "But," said I, timorously, and with a blankness of despair coming over me, "we could walk, you know—walk *very* fast." In the confusion of my senses I did not see how this process could convey us faster than cab and horse. But this I did see: that it was all over with me for that night. And so, wet, miserable physically, miserable morally, I announced to the Contemporary Boy that we were going home; and this quieted his dastard soul.

The Retreat was accomplished with wonderful skill, but under circumstances of terrible hardship. It seemed to be all splash, soak, and flounder. We were perpetually stumbling into puddles—a minor trouble—yet I know not if it were not the sorest of all our miseries. After prodigies of generalship we reached our own door. The maid who opened it was all in a fright. We presented a piteous spectacle, as though newly taken out of the water by the grappels of the Humane Society's men. But I had presence of mind to caution her to strict silence; and we crept up-stairs to bed. The state of the stair-carpeting after our passage was (I was afterwards informed on good authority) a subject of grief and scandal to the person whose duty it was to look after that department. Hot drinks were suggested; an offer greedily caught at by the Contemporary Boy. I accepted it languidly, on sanitary grounds, for indeed I was growing indifferent to life. This last blow and stroke of ill success had finished me. I looked on myself as separated from the Queen of My Soul for ever, and I buried my head in fine linen and blankets, supremely wretched. I was shivering all down the back, and very hot and dry about the throat.

By-and-by came home Honest John Plusher and his wife. I heard them knock, I heard their voices on the stairs, as in wonder; for it was early, and they expected to see us up. I was quivering and rattling and chattering my teeth, when lights flashed in the room, and Honest John stood over me.

"Halloa!" he cried, in his cheerful way, "what's all this?" (Just as I had feared, the craven Contemporary Boy had betrayed me.) "Come, come, we shall be all right again in the morning, hey, shan't we?" And yet I detected a wounded tone in Honest John's manner, which pained me to the quick. "Why," he said, "couldn't you have told me? Old John would have been game for a second go at the pantomime, if you had asked him. You might have trusted me, my boy, instead of stealing off, and half killing yourself." This was indeed heaping on coals of fire. Deceive Honest John on mere

common grounds? no, not for worlds, not for all the cakes, apples, theatres, and pocket eight-bladed knives (with ingenious appliance for removing a stone out of a horse's shoe) in the world! But here I was, racked with a gnawing passion for a Celestial Being of ambrosial make, a passion which was consuming me as with slow fire. Surely there was some excuse. John went on in the same mournfully injured way, heaping on the coals of fire as with a shovel. "If you had told me, my boy, we could have fixed for to-morrow night, taken a cab, and done the thing decently. I thought you and I knew one another better than that. I don't care much for the sort of thing myself, except just once and away; but if you had told me, or——" I could bear it no longer. "O John! John!" I said, "I am a wretched, miserable, broken-hearted boy;" and, drawing down his head to me, with much confusion, and I believe with tears, told him my state of mind.

Why had I not confided in him? Why? In all my life I never experienced such nobility, such true nobleness, responsive to my confidence. He entered into it like a thorough gentleman; understood it perfectly, sympathised pitifully. He comforted and compassionated me. He soothed my poor wrung heart. Nay, more—wonderful to relate—he promised to assist me to the utmost of his power. A thrill passed over me, in addition to the physical anguish thrill. I could not believe my senses. "Yes, yes," said Honest John, with mystery. "You must go to sleep now. But I have thought of a scheme; we will plan it all together in the morning. Hush! not a word more to-night. Rely on me. Mrs. Mountjack is the very woman."

Mrs. Mountjack the very woman! Why? How singular! What could it mean? But Cousin John was a man of deep purpose, and when he spoke, spoke what he meant to do. I allowed the image of the divine and radiant Being to rise before me clothed in light, held with her a short and rapturous conversation, and dropped away into sweeter dreams.

How mysterious are the workings of fate! In the morning I rose fresh and perfectly restored to health, while the craven Contemporary Boy was, according to the strange metaphor, as hoarse as a drum. His eyes were swollen frightfully in his head. I could not but interpret this as just retribution for his abject behaviour of the previous night.

Honest John and I had a private interview in the parlour before breakfast. I again told him candidly my views, which were of the most honourable tenor. I seemed to myself of a sudden to have grown a man. I spoke calmly and composedly. I would go through with it, I said. But to come to details. What of this Mrs. Mountjack, the person to whom allusion had been made the night before?

Then Honest John unfolded. His statement was full and satisfactory, and left nothing

to be desired. The plan was delightfully clear and simple. Mrs. Mountjack was a milliner, who did work, "bodies," &c., in an economical way for Mrs. Honest John. There was nothing very important in that, and my face fell. But Mrs. Mountjack had a sister (there was scarcely much more in *that*), and this sister was engaged as costumière at the theatre. Ah! there was much in *that*, and my face rose. Cousin John was indeed honest!—a brave deliverer—a noble creature! When was it to be? That very day if I liked.

We saw Mrs. Mountjack. She was not very busy. She could spare us an hour. She could come now—to be sure. Margaret Mountjack was down at the theatre. We took a cab, the three of us.

My heart beat tremendously. Those were terrible moments of commingled joy and anxiety. I was all in a tremble and a flutter, for I was now, in all human probability, to see my princess. She was to be there—was sure to be there—temporarily on a visit from diviner regions—was Mrs. Ricks. Who was she? Mrs. Ricks was the fairy queen. What! not known by some female spiritual name, common to the angelic choirs? No! Simply Mrs. Ricks, wife of Ricks. What! married? And why not? And yet, somehow, it seemed to me ludicrous and absurd and dismal. Ricks was a pantaloon at one of the minor theatres over the bridge. It surely should not have been so ordained.

At a dingy lane we were set down, and entered at a dingy door in the dingy lane. The sense of awe and general flutter I experienced at this moment, is beyond description. How would she appear? Glorified, and in her habitual medium of ambrosial pink light; or in a sort of celestial undress? I trembled, for these were awful questions.

We went through many dark passages, Mrs. Mountjack leading. The flavour of these places was unpleasant, verging on the charnel-house flavour. But what of that! We went up little short flights of steps of three or four stairs each; we went round sharp corners, got glimpses into what seemed a huge cellar lighted from chinks in the wall, and finally arrived at a rather cheerful room where there was a fire, and where, too, there were several women busy "cutting out" and sewing gaudy materials, and where the air seemed charged with remnants. The leading cutter-out was a Mountjack. With her, the other Mountjack—*our* Mountjack—communed a few moments mysteriously. They looked over at me. She then went out—the other Mountjack—and we were invited to admire the articles of apparel in hand. A stream of decayed persons in ill health evidently from the tone of their cheeks, and as evidently not privileged to live in the rich and fattening ambrosial air of the theatre, came in and out. A sallow man, with white-lead cheeks, a tightly-buttoned coat, and a walking-cane

sticking out of his under-coat pocket; a fat man, but of the same tinge; a tall lean man; a short stout man, all more or less funny in their remarks, but all with the same curious marks of relationship about them; women, too, sickly unwholesome creatures, dressed rather like decayed housemaids, one with a large umbrella, another in an old striped shawl, with a basket on her arm, and leading a very cold child with a bit of boa round its neck for a comforter. She was as yellow as a guinea, and looked as if she had lately been ill.

"Mind ye have the new 'body' for me to-night," she said. "Mr. Perkeboys says so. Bless ye, what a hurry I'm in! Good-by, Mrs. Mountjack."

"Wait, do," said our Mountjack. "She's gone to look for you."

"I can't stay," said the woman; and dragged away the cold child with her.

We waited a few seconds more, and admired some spangles to fill up the time. (How different they, from the *real* molten gold, all in a state of liquefaction, that streamed out in all directions at night!) Then came back the other Mountjack in great haste.

"I can't find her nowheres—I can't find Mrs. Ricks."

"Bless you, she was here," says her sister. "Come and gone!"

"Oh, was she! Then that's all right. You saw her, then?"

"Who?" says Honest John. "Why, was that her?"

"Her with the child. Yes," says both the Mountjacks.

"Bless my soul," cries Honest John Plusher, "what a world it is! So that was the Fairy Queen!"

I could not believe it. I refused to believe it. I laughed scornfully.

But I came to believe it afterwards, and I have believed it ever since, and I believe it now. It was a cruel crushing blow. O Harlequin Fairy Morgana, I have found a greater changer than you, many and many a time since that day!

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